

أَحِبُّهُمْ وَأُذَارِيهِمْ وَأُوتِرُهُمْ

I love them, I serve them, I put them before myself

بِمُهْجَتِي وَخُصُوصًا مِنْهُمْ نَفَرٌ

with my life, and especially a group among them

قَوْمٌ كَرَامُ السَّجَايَا حَيْثُمَا جَلَسُوا

Men of noble traits, who, wherever they have sat

يَبْقَى الزَّمَانُ عَلَى آثَارِهِمْ عَطِرًا

leave that place wreathed in fragrance unending



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Maqam Imam Al-Haddad

GIFTS for THE SEEKER BEING SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS

Imam 'Abdullah bin 'Alawi al-Haddad

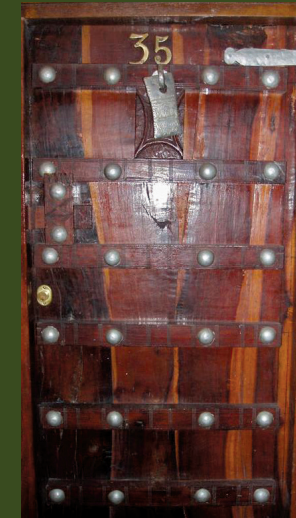
اتِّحَافِ السَّائِلِ بِجَوَابِ الْمَسَائِلِ

GIFTS for THE SEEKER

BEING SOME ANSWERED QUESTIONS

Imam al-Haddad

al-Hadhrami, al-Shafii, al-Hussaini
May Allah, the Exalted Have Mercy Upon Him



لِمَقَامِ الْإِمَامِ الْحَدَّادِ

تَرْجُمَةً
لِلْحَاوِي
ت: ١٥٩٤٤
بِرَبِّهِ وَتِلْكَ بِرَبِّهِ
بِالْمَقَامِ الْحَدَّادِ

AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

إِثْحَافِ السَّائِلِ بِجَوَابِ الْمَسَائِلِ

Ithaafis Saail bi-jawaabil Masaail

Gifts for the Seeker Being Some Answered Questions

Imam al-Haddad

al-Hadhrami, al-Shafii, al-Hussaini

May Allah, the Exalted Have Mercy Upon Him

Door Photo



An English Translation

إِتْحَافِ السَّائِلِ بِجَوَابِ الْمَسَائِلِ

لِإِمَامِ شَيْخِ الْإِسْلَامِ قُطْبِ الدَّعْوَةِ وَالْإِرْشَادِ
الْحَبِيبِ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَلَوِي الْحَدَّادِ
الْحَضَرَمِيِّ الشَّافِعِيِّ الْحُسَيْنِيِّ
رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى

Front Cover showing the restored front door entrance to
Imam al-Haddad House in Hawi Tarim Hadhramaut Yemen

Gifts for the Seeker

Being Some Answered Questions

By the Imam, al-Sheikh of Islam,
the Pivot of Dakwah, the Guiding Light
the Beloved Abdullah bin Alwi al-Haddad
al-Hadhrami, al-Shafii, al-Hussaini

May Allah, the Exalted have mercy upon him

An English Translation

Imam Al-Haddad's manuscripts
were recompiled into books by
Habib Ali bin Isa bin Abdulkader
Al-Haddad. Subsequently,
they were re-edited, reprinted,
translated and distributed by
various inspired parties.

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A Short Biography of Imam Al-Haddad



In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

He is Al-Imam Al-Habib Abdullah bin Alawi Bin Muhammad Al-Haddad, the famous Imam, the *Shaykh* of Islam, the foremost of the people unification, the noble descendant of the Prophet, Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, a descendant of Al-Imam Hussein, may Allah be pleased with him, the *Shaykh* Abdullah ibn Alawi Al-Haddad Al-Alawi, may Allah reward him for us with the best rewards He gives those of His people who guide us to Him.

He was born in Subair, a small suburb in Tarim, Hadhramaut, South Yemen, on the night 5 Safar 1044 after Hijrah. Tarim was already a centre of the learned *Asyraf* of the descendant of *Saiyidina* Hussein bin Ali bin Abu Talib. He grew up in an enlightened environment. He was raised and educated there, initially taught by his father, and was never seen to show the recklessness of other children. He lost his eyesight while still young and was granted the power of discernment as compensation. He gathered as he grew, the best of knowledge and spirituality, and became outstanding in knowledge, guidance, calling people to Allah, and being a shaykh in the perfect sense of the word. He was given the title Pole of Guidance [*Qutbul Irshad*] by the greatest of the people of knowledge in his time and after that until today.

Some have said that there were three ranks in calling to Allah, according to whether it was done by pen, tongue or foot (travelling). All three were combined to perfection in the works of Imam Al-Haddad, may Allah shower His mercy upon him. His books are still in print in Egypt, India, Hijaz, Istanbul, and Java. His fame spread throughout the Muslim world, and his writings which were clearly based on the Quran and the practices of the Prophet [*Sunnah*] were never criticized nor thought to be controversial.

His roots from the Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, blessings and peace upon him, from Fatima Az-Zahraa, daughter of Muhammad and Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib, Gate to (The Radiant) the City of Knowledge, may Allah be pleased with him and all his descendants.

Then on from Al-Imam Hussein > Imam Ali Zainal Abidin > Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir > Imam Jaafar As-Saadiq > Imam Ali Al-Uraidhi > Imam Muhammad An-Naqib > Isa Ar-Rumi > Ahmad Al-Muhajir illa Allah > Ubaidillah > Alawi > Muhammad > Alawi > Ali Khali' Qassam > Muhammad of Mirbat > Alawi > Abdur Rahman > Ahmad Al-Faqih > Abdullah > Muhammad > Ahmad > Abu Bakr At-Tawil > Ahmad Al-Haddad > Alawi > Muhammad > Abdullah > Ahmad > Muhammad > Alawi > Abdullah Qutbul Irshad

He earnestly sought knowledge, accompanying such scholars as:

1. al-Habib Umar bin Abdul Rahman Al-Attas
2. al-Habib Oukail bin Abdurrahman As-Saqqaf
3. al-Habib Abdurrahman bin Syaikh Aideed
4. al-Habib Sahl Bin Ahmed Bahasan Al-Hadeely Baalwi
5. as-Saeed Muhammad Bin Alwi As-Saqqaf

Amongst his students are:

1. His son, our leader al-Habib Hassan bin Abdullah Al-Haddad.
2. al-Habib Ahmad bin Zain Al-Habshee
3. al-Habib Abdurrahman bin Abdullah Bilfaqeh
4. al-Habib Muhammad bin Zain bin Semait
al-Habib Umar bin Zain bin Semait
5. al-Habib Umar bin Abdurrahman Al-Bar
6. al-Habib Ali bin Abdullah bin Abdurrahman As-Saqqaf
7. al-Habib Muhammad bin Umar bin Taha As-Safi As-Saqqaf
and many others.

It seems as if he was selected to carry out the mission of *dakwah* for Islam and spiritual guidance using wit and wisdom. People eventually entirely attended to him, and his name has become popular.

People from different fields of life benefited from his books, preaching and guidance. His mission received people's approval and love. His publications have been translated into English, Malay, French and other languages. He passed away on the evening of Tuesday, 7 *Dzulqaedah* 1132 Hijrah and was buried in a simple grave at the graveyard of Zambal in Tarim. May Allah show mercy on him and reward him abundantly.

His publications are distinctively popular among the old and young then and till now. They include the following:

١. النَّصَائِحُ الدِّينِيَّةُ وَالْوَصَايَا الْإِيمَانِيَّةُ.

An Nasaih id-Diniyya wal Wasaya al-Imaniyyah.

1. Sincere Religious Advice and Recommendations of the Iman.

٢. الدَّعْوَةُ التَّامَّةُ وَالتَّذَكِيرَةُ الْعَامَّةُ.

Ad-Da'watut-Taammah wat-Tadhkiratul 'Aammah.

2. Perfect Summons and General Admonition.

٣. رِسَالَةُ الْمُعَاوَنَةِ وَالْمُظَاهَرَةِ وَالْمُؤَاوَزَةِ لِلرَّاعِيَيْنِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي سُلُوكِ طَرِيقِ الْآخِرَةِ.

Risalatul Mu'awanah wal Muzhaharah wal Mu'azarah Lir-Raagibeen Minal Mu'mineen Fee Suluki Tariq-al-Akhirah.

3. The Book of Assistance, Support and Encouragement for Such Believers as Desire to Follow the Way of the Afterlife.

٤. الْفُصُولُ الْعِلْمِيَّةُ وَالْأُصُولُ الْحِكْمِيَّةُ.

Al-Fusul ul-'Ilmiyyah wal Usul ul-Hikamiyyah.

4. Knowledge and the Principles of Wisdom.

٥. سَبِيلُ الْإِذْكَارِ وَالْإِعْتِبَارِ بِمَا يَمُرُّ بِالْإِنْسَانِ وَيَنْقُضِي لَهُ مِنَ الْأَعْمَارِ.

Sabilul-Iddhikaar wal-I'tibaar Bima Yamurru bil-Insan Wa Yanqadhee Lahu Minal A'maar.

5. The Way to Remember and Learn from the Lives of Man that Wane and Perish.

٦. رِسَالَةُ الْمُذَاكَرَةِ مَعَ الْإِخْوَانِ الْمُحِبِّينَ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْخَيْرِ وَالِدِّينِ.

Risalatul Muzhaakarah Ma'al-Ikhwaanil-Muhibbeen Min Ahlil Khayr Waddeen.

6. A Discussion Among Brothers and the Loved Ones From Among the Righteous in Good Deeds and Faith.

٧. رِسَالَةُ آدَابِ سُلُوكِ الْمُرِيدِ. *Rislatu Aadaabi Suluk il-Murid.*

7. The Book of Discipline in the Path of the Seeker.

٨. كِتَابُ الْحِكْمِ. *Kitaabul Hikam.*

8. Book of Wisdom.

٩. النَّفَاسُ الْعَلَوِيُّ فِي الْمَسَائِلِ الصُّوفِيَّةِ.

An-Nafaais-il Alawiyyah fil Masaail-as-Sufiyyah.

9. The Gems of the *Alawiyya* Concerning Sufism.

١٠. إِثْحَافُ السَّائِلِ بِجَوَابِ الْمَسَائِلِ.

Ithaaf is-Saail bi-Jawabil Masaail.

10. The Gifts for the Seeker Being Some Answered Questions.

١١. الْوَصَايَا النَّافِعَةُ. *Al Wasaya an-nafi'ah.*

11. Beneficial Religious Counsels.

١٢. وَسَيْلَةُ الْعِبَادِ إِلَى زَادِ الْمَعَادِ.

Waseelatul 'Ibaad Ilaa Zaadil Ma'aad.

12. A Means for People to Provide for the Hereafter. (A Compilation of the Imam Azkaar and Awraad, including *Wird Latif*, *Wird Kabir*, *Ratib al-Shahir*, *Hizbul-Fath* and *Hizbun-Nasr* by Habib Muhammad bin Alawi Al- Haddad).

١٣. الدُّرُّ الْمَنْظُومُ لِذَوِي الْعُقُولِ وَالْفُهُومِ.

Ad-Durrul Mandhum Li zawil 'Uqul Wal Fuhum.

13. Poetic Pearls for Discerning and Understanding Minds. This is his *Diwan*, the best of his *Qaseedas*.

١٤. تَثْبِيثُ الْقُلُوبِ - بِذِكْرِ كَلَامِ مَجَالِسِ.

Tathbitul fu'ad bizikir kalam majilis.

14. Affirming of the Hearts - with Remembrance of the Speeches at Majlis Volume I and Volume II.

١٥. مُكَاتِبَاتُ الْإِمَامِ الْحَدَّادِ.

Mukatibat Al-Imam Al-Haddad.

15. Correspondences of Imam Al-Haddad.

Most of Imam Al-Haddad's manuscripts were recompiled by Habib Ali bin Isa bin Abdulkader Al-Haddad, who was born in Singapore and educated in Tarim. They were subsequently re-edited, reprinted, translated and distributed by various inspired parties.

Scholars, as well as the laymen, so highly admired the works that they would read them repeatedly. These scholarly works have also been described as a summary of the quintessence of Scholar Ghazali's literature and eventually indispensable as being brief, but comprehensive.

Preface

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ.

“In the name of Allah, the Infinitely Merciful, the Compassionate.”

وَلَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ.

“There is no might or power except with the permission of Allah
The Most-High, the Magnificent.”

سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ.

“Glory to You, we have no knowledge, save what You has taught us:
In truth, it is You Who are perfect in knowledge and wisdom.”¹

All praise and thanks belongs to Allah, who never disappoints those who hope in Him, never refuses those who ask of Him, never ignores those who quest for Him, never underpays those who act for Him, never deprives those who thank Him, never fails those who battle for Him, never allows those whose comfort is in His remembrance to be estranged, never surrender to others those who surrender to His might, never abandons to others those who depend on Him, and never forsakes those who trust and commit themselves to Him. Those who firmly hold to His Book shall never err, and those who take refuge in His Presence shall never find disgrace.

I praise Him for all that He has inspired and taught and thank Him for all His grace and bounties. His help I request to fulfil His immense right (upon us), and I seek refuge in the light of His noble Countenance against the loss of His favours and the onslaught of

¹ Surah 2 Al Baqarah Verse 32.

affliction. It is Allah I ask to whelm with His blessings and peace His most noble Prophet, most eminent Messenger and most exceptional Beloved, who is our master and patron Muhammad, and his family and Companions, who are the essence of excellence and generosity, the very fountainhead of knowledge and wisdom. And may these blessings and peace endure for as long as pens write and banners are unfurled!

Let us proceed. The righteous sheikh of integrity and intelligent understanding, `AbdurRahman ibn Abdullah `Abbad, has requested me to answer a number of questions which he committed to writing and presented to me in the town of Shibam¹ after my visit to the great gnostic Sheikh Said bin Isa al-Amudi and to other people of virtue, both living and dead, in those regions. I perceived in him signs of eagerness for the truth, combined with the fragrance of sincerity, and therefore promised him a response. The time has now come to fulfil that promise by Allah's ability and power and to welcome the arrival of his pertinent questions with the hospitable offer of clear replies.

I feel it is appropriate to precede these answers with this preface which will give insight and reassurance both to the questioner and to all other intelligent people of similar tendency.

Therefore I seek Allah's help, relying on Him, committing myself to Him, and asking Him, Transcendent is He, to guide me to that which is correct in His sight,

وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ.

“For He (Allah) do guide whom He please to a way that is straight.”²

صِرَاطِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَلَا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَصِيرُ الْأُمُورُ.

“The Way of Allah, to Whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth. Behold (how) all affairs tend towards Allah!”³

¹ A town in the Hadhramaut valley of Yemen to the west of Tarim.

² Surah 10 Yunus – second part of verse 25.

³ Surah 42 Ash Shura Verse 53.

Introduction

You should know that to put a question whenever a need or a problem arises and to seek further knowledge and insight is the habit and custom of the elite of every time and place. It is deemed obligatory where necessary knowledge is concerned, and virtue in the case of supererogatory knowledge. For questions are the keys to the sciences and the secrets of the Unseen which some people carry in their hearts and breasts.

Just as valuables and goods kept within locked houses can be reached only by using keys fashioned of iron or wood, so too are these sciences and gnosis, borne by scholars and gnostic to be reached only by questions fashioned out of the wish to profit, and accompanied by sincerity, enthusiasm, and courteous manners.

Questioning is encouraged and urged by the Sharia, for Allah the Exalted says,

فَاسْأَلِ الَّذِينَ يَفْرُءُونَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ.

“Then ask those who recite the Book before you,”¹

فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الدِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالزُّبُرِ.

“Then ask of those who possess the Message We sent to them with Clear Signs and Books of dark prophecies.”²

¹ Surah 10 Yunus the mid-section of Verse 94.

² Surah 16 An-Nahl second part of verse 43 and first part of verse 44.

And the Messenger of Allah may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said,

حُسْنُ السُّؤَالِ نِصْفُ الْعِلْمِ.

“A good question is already half of knowledge.”

The intention of every leading scholar or Imam who has ever informed others of the breadth of his knowledge was that this should be known about him so that people might ask and seek it from him. This was related in the case of Ali, may Allah honour him, ibn Masud, ibn Abbas, ibn Umar, Abu Hurayra, and others among the early predecessors and those who came later, may Allah be pleased with them all. And then there were other scholars, such as Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, al-Hasan al-Basri and Qatada who likewise encouraged people to put questions to them.

Sufyan al-Thawri immediately left any town he entered when none of its people asked him for knowledge, saying, “This is a town where knowledge dies”.

Whenever al-Shibli may Allah have mercy on him, sat in his teaching circle [*halaqa*] and no questions were put forth to him, he would recite,

وَوَقَعَ الْقَوْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمَا ظَلَمُوا فَهُمْ لَا يَتُكَلِّمُونَ.

“And the Word will be fulfilled against them, because of their wrongdoing, and they will be unable to speak (in plea).”¹

Sometimes a scholar asks his class a question to assess their knowledge and so be able to benefit them, just as it was related in a sound hadith that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, once asked a group of his Companions about a tree the leaves of which did not fall and which resembled the believer. None of those present answered, so he informed them, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, that it was the date-palm. Then ibn Umar was present and had recognized it but kept his silence.

¹ Surah 27 An-Naml Verse 85.

Subsequently, he informed his father and the latter reprimanded him for his silence.

Then Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, often questioned his companions, and whenever one of them replied, “Allah knows best,” he would become angry, and declare, “I did not ask you about Allah’s knowledge, but about yours, either say “I know” or “I know not”!

A scholar may question one of his companions about something which he already knows, so that others present may benefit. Such, for example, were the questions put to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him, by Gabriel, upon him be peace, concerning *Islam*, *Iman* and *Ihsan*.

A lesser man may for subtle reasons be in possession of a particular item of knowledge unknown to a superior one, and the latter may thus need to ask him about it. An example of this is Umar’s questioning of Hudhayfa, may Allah be pleased with them, about future tribulations, and about the hypocrites.

A scholar may ask his equal, or one who is nearly so, about the way he has understood certain things in Allah’s Book and the Sunna of His Messenger, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him, to see whether they share the same opinion, which will serve to confirm or strengthen it. This again resembles the practice of Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, who asked a group of the Companions about a particular interpretation of the verse,

“When comes the Help of Allah, and Victory.”¹ إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ.

And only Ibn 'Abbas agreed with him, may Allah be pleased with them both. Many such things occurred with great men, in both the early and later generations.

As for Umar’s question to Ali, may Allah be pleased with them both, the purpose behind it was to learn from him, since Ali was granted a privilege shared by no other Companion, which was to be

¹ Surah 110 An-Nasr Verse 1

the “Gate to the City of Knowledge” the city being the Messenger himself, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him.

But then there was the order given by the Messenger of Allah, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him, to his Companions not to ask him too many questions. This prohibition, although stated in general terms, was mainly directed at questions concerning legal judgments, retaliatory punishments [*hudud*] and public affairs. This was out of compassion for the Nation, and out of the merciful wish that they should not be charged with something they would be unable to implement. The evidence to support this is His, Exalted is He, saying,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَسْأَلُوا عَنْ أَشْيَاءٍ إِنْ تُبَدَّ لَكُمْ تَسْؤُكُمْ وَإِنْ تَسْأَلُوا عَنْهَا حِينَ يُنَزَّلَ الْقُرْآنُ تُبَدَّ لَكُمْ عَمَّا اللَّهُ عَنْهَا، وَاللَّهُ عَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ.

“O ye who believe! Ask not questions about things which, if made plain to you, may cause you trouble. But if ye ask about things when the Qur'an is being revealed, they will be made plain to you, Allah will forgive those: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Forbearing.”

قَدْ سَأَلَهَا قَوْمٌ مِّن قَبْلِكُمْ ثُمَّ أَصْبَحُوا بِهَا كَافِرِينَ.

“Some people before you did ask such questions, and on that account lost their faith.”¹

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him, also said,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ فَرَضَ فَرَائِضَ فَلَا تَضَيِّعُوهَا، وَحَدَّ حُدُودًا فَلَا تَعْتَدُوهَا، وَحَرَّمَ أَشْيَاءَ فَلَا تَنْتَهِكُوهَا وَسَكَتَ عَنْ أَشْيَاءَ رَحْمَةً لَّكُمْ غَيْرَ نَسْيَانٍ فَلَا تَبْهَثُوا عَنْهَا.

“Allah has made certain obligations incumbent upon you, so neglect them not. He has drawn limits; therefore violate them not. He has prohibited certain things, therefore commit them not. And He has remained silent concerning certain things out of mercy for you, not out of forgetfulness, therefore, do not inquire about them.”

¹ Surah Al-Maida Verses 101-102.

And in another hadith,

إِنَّمَا أَهْلَكَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ، كَثْرَةُ مَسَائِلِهِمْ وَاخْتِلَافِهِمْ عَلَى أَنْبِيَائِهِمْ.

“Those who came before you were destroyed by their many questions and their arguments about what was brought to them by their Prophets.”

Once a man asked the Messenger of Allah, upon whom be Allah’s blessings and peace, concerning the Pilgrimage [*Haj*], “Was a yearly obligation?” and the Prophet kept his silence. When he repeated his question, he replied, “Once in a lifetime; and had I said, “Yes!” it would have become obligatory for you, and you would have been unable to comply.” Underlying this anecdote is a noble secret which it is not permissible to disclose in writing, but you can search for it within the context of Exalted is He, He says,

مَنْ يُطِيعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ

“He who obeys the Messenger obeys Allah.”¹
and,

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُبَايِعُونَكَ إِنَّمَا يُبَايِعُونَ اللَّهَ.

“Those who pledge their allegiance to you do but pledge their allegiance to Allah.”²

A disciple who asks his sheikh question, or a student who asks his teacher, should have no other aim but to benefit and should beware of wanting to test him, for that may lead to his deprivation and failure.

When a disciple or student asks a sheikh or a scholar about something the knowledge of which may be harmful or beyond his understanding, then the latter should stop and ponder; they are to inform the questioner of his lack of qualification only if their assessment of him is that (such a response) will not break his heart, and be religiously damaging to him, or that no aversion will arise in his soul which would deflect him from his quest; otherwise, they

¹ Surah 4 An-Nisaa Verse 80.

² Surah 48 Al-Fath Verse 10.

should stop in their answer to his level of knowledge and understanding. Should they divert the response from the strict implication of the question they are not to say, as one of the people of realization [*al-Haqiqi*] once said,

عَلَيَّ نَحْتُ الْقَوَافِي مِنْ مَعَادِنَهَا وَمَا عَلَيَّ إِذَا لَمْ تَفْهَمْ الْبَقَرُ

It is my duty to carve rhymes from the bedrock of words;

It is not my concern if cattle do not comprehend.

For such an utterance is peculiar to a specific spiritual state and situation. Then a sheikh or a scholar is like a compassionate father and a gentle tutor; he speaks in such a manner as to be of benefit and profit.

However, for Gnostics [*al-Arifin*] are subject to overpowering and absorbing spiritual states in which they become unable to keep in mind what we have just mentioned; how they arrived at their state [*hal*] should be acknowledged, for they are too high in rank to be objected to or accused of ignorance or negligence. This is not the place, moreover, to elaborate justification of such authoritative writers for divulging in their books and treatises the secrets of Lordship and the realities of the Unseen.

It may be permissible for a man to question another with the intention of testing him in two situations.

The first is when a scholar, compassionate and of competent counsel, sees a man so deeply under the sway of self-admiration that he is prevented from seeking knowledge, or from adding to the knowledge which he already has, or from acknowledging the merits of the virtuous; he may then question him, preferably in private to test and try him, so that this man may know his real worth, this being a form of counsel to him.

The second is when one sees a hypocrite speaking assertively, and threatening to confuse weak believers by introducing into religion things which do not belong to it; he may then question him in their presence to test him and demonstrate to them his failings and his ignorance. While doing so, his intention should be to counsel and warn

him about his faults, in the hope that he will return to a fairer judgment and submit to the truth. It is this that has drawn the scholars, may Allah be pleased with them, into debates with those who innovate, deviate, or falsify the truth.

Whenever a scholar is asked for information which he ought to be teaching, it is not permissible for him to keep silent, for the Prophet upon him be Allah's blessings and peace said,

مَنْ سُئِلَ عَنْ عِلْمٍ فَكْتَمَهُ أُجِمَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ بِلِجَامٍ مِنْ نَارٍ.

“On the Day of Rising, Allah will garb in a bridle of fire the man who withholds knowledge that is requested of him.”

The scholars of the present time must not keep their knowledge to themselves and wait for someone to come along and ask, for most people today are complacent about religion, uninterested in knowledge and in anything else that will benefit them in the hereafter, to the extent that a man's beard may grow white and he still knows nothing of the obligatory parts of the ritual ablution and prayer, or what is mandatory for him to know by way of belief in Allah, His Angels, Books, Messengers and the Last Day. The very states of such people mutely proclaim their ignorance; and for scholars endowed with understanding, that is sufficient to be a question.

A seeker travelling to Allah, whose sole aim is to acquire knowledge of Him, and whose wish is to rid himself of anything that may distract him from going to Him, should never ask for knowledge unless it is necessary for his condition (status) and time. However, in this blessed time of ours, such a seeker is stranger than the Phoenix and rarer than the philosopher's stone.

So let each man be prolific in his questioning after knowledge, so as to profit and grow, for a believer is never sated with good things. In a hadith, it was narrated,

مَنْهُمَانِ لَا يَشْبَعَانِ، مَنْهُمُ الْعِلْمُ، وَمَنْهُمُ الْمَالُ.

“Two kinds of people can never get enough: those who are avid for knowledge, and those who are avid for money.”

The proof for what we said about the seeker was what is related to us about Dawud al-Taii, may Allah's mercy be upon him. When he decided to devote himself to Allah, he began by sitting with the scholars, and he thus kept the company of Imam Abu Hanifa, may Allah's mercy be upon him, for nearly a year. He said, sometimes, when a question arose in his mind which he was "more eager to know than a thirsting man is yearns for cool water" he refrained from asking about it. The reason being, as we said earlier, that a seeker is only to ask about that which is a necessity for him.

There are many proofs [*dalil*] and practices to support the topics discussed in this brief introduction, lest it would lead us away from our intended brevity if we were to delve into every one of them. The indications that we have given will, however, be sufficient.

Success is from Allah, also help and confirmation. We trust in Him, upon Him do we rely upon.

وَهُوَ حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ

For us, Allah suffices, and He is the best disposer of affairs.

It is now time to begin fulfilling our purpose.

وَاللَّهُ يَقُولُ الْحَقَّ وَهُوَ يَهْدِي السَّبِيلَ.

"But Allah tells (you) the Truth, and He shows the (right) Way.¹"



¹ Surah 33 Al Ahzab Verse 4.

Chapter One

The Science of Unification Introduction

You ask, “Did Allah honour you with the enlightened understanding and the Opening Path to His Lordship with the meaning of the phrase”

“*La ilaha illalla?*” لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

Then you must know that all the religious knowledge and its related questions are but unfolding of the meaning of this noble phrase and of the rights it has over mankind, which take the form of injunctions, prohibitions, promises, warnings, and their entailments. That which is an exposition of its rights is consequently an explanation of it. The purpose of this statement is to make you aware that it is impossible to know the details of each of its sciences fully, let alone write them all down, as will become evident from what is to follow.

To explain what it means in itself: it is the knowledge termed the Science of Unification [*ilmul tawhid*], which is a plentiful sea, the shore of which can never be reached and the bottom never fathomed. The theologians [*mutakallimun*] have only skimmed over its large surface, while the realizing gnostic [*al-arifin*] has plunged into its depths and attained to some of its precious and innumerable subtleties, gems, and beautiful and strange things.

Following their prolonged and profound search, and having exhausted their energies and abilities, they unanimously confessed

their inability to reach its limit or perceive its end. This was because in order fully to apprehend the Science of Unification [*ilmul Tauhid*], one has fully to comprehend the Essence and Attributes of the Unified and He is immeasurably too high for that.

All sound authorities agreed that to fully apprehend the Essence and Attributes of Allah, the Exalted, is impossible, whether in this world or the next.

Then there was an exception of a man from the clan of *ta'ifa* who gave the impression that it could occur. There is no need to mention his name since the error of his position is evident.

Thus to fully apprehend Him is impossible because it would require an absolute mastery and power to seize; for someone who 'apprehends' something, whether by knowing everything about it or in any other manner, is capturing and mastering it, partly or wholly, whereas the Real, Exalted is He, is the Master, Who cannot be learned. You must be aware of this!

There are two parts to the Science of Unification [*ilmul Tauhid*]. The first part is outward [*dzahir*] apparent or evident; to be learned through arguments and proofs. It is a duty for every believer to know a certain minimum amount of this, without which his faith will not be sound.

A theologian [*mutakallim*] is a man concerned with the exposition and defence of this science, and the enquiry into its arguments and proofs. Although this gives him superiority over the ordinary believers, this superiority must be one of faith and knowledge; otherwise, it will be nothing but an empty shell.

The second part is inward [*batin*] or mystical; it is that which can only be perceived through Unveiling or revelation [*kashaf*] and vision [*'ayaani*]. It is the legacy of [*taqwa*] and the essence of that right-guidance which is the fruit of self-discipline or striving against the inner self [*mujahada*]. It is a secret between the servant and his Lord. Those who possess it may speak about it among themselves, but they are, may Allah be pleased with them, meticulous not to divulge it

to the unqualified. Then it was the practice of al-Junayd may Allah have mercy upon him, whenever he wished to discourse upon it with his companions, he would lock his door and place the key under his thigh. This they do out of compassion for the believers.

Indeed, for anyone who stumbles across this kind of knowledge without being qualified either denies it, and is thus regarded by Allah as being among those who reject that with which they are unfamiliar, or else will believe it but understand it in a way which differs from its original intention, and thus stumble into error.

You should know that this science is hinted at in the writings of the people of realization, such as the Revival [*ihya*] and the Nourishment [*quuta*]. Such authors permitted themselves to do this in order to arouse the yearning of sincere seekers, and because in some contexts the benefit to be derived from the science of religious transaction [*mua'mala*], which it was their purpose to expound, depends on its mention. Otherwise, they have been very reluctant to make any mention of it.

Have you not noticed how Imam al-Ghazali may Allah have mercy upon him, whenever he nears these tumultuous seas, remarked, "Here we shall withhold the pen," and sometimes he said, "Here is a secret into which we shall not delve," and other times, "This belongs to the science of Unveiling [*mukashafa*], and it is not our purpose to discuss it in the context of the science of religious transactions," and so on?

As for those Sufis who included some aspects of this knowledge in their books, such as *al-Hatimi*, *al-Jilani* and others who acted in similar vein, this should either be attributed to their being overpowered and a man overwhelmed is excusable or to their having received a permission for the man who receives such approval is under an order which he can but obey and the secret of the consent granted in such matters is itself one that cannot be divulged.

The Exoteric meanings of *La ilaha illalla*

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

In this section, we will discuss one part of the outward or apparent sense of *La ilaha illalla*, having already explained why we should keep silent about its inward [*batin*] or mystical meaning. We thus say:

You must know that “There is no god other than Allah,” He is the Necessary Existent by His essence; He is Unique, the One, the Able Sovereign, the Living and Sustaining, the Ancient without beginning, the Eternal without end. He is the One with the knowledge of all things and,

“power over all affairs,”¹

عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ،

“carries out all that He wills,”²

يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ،

“do command according to His will and plan,”³

وَيَحْكُمُ مَا يُرِيدُ،

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ، وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ.

“There is nothing whatever like to Him, and He is the One that hears and sees all things.”⁴

Holy and Exalted is He beyond being resembled or equalled or having a partner or a minister. He is not subject to time; neither is He distracted by one affair away from another. He is neither subject to location nor affected by contingencies. He is absolutely Independent of all things, whatever their nature and however they are envisaged. All that is not Him needs Him in a way so total that it cannot even be conceived to diminish. He has created all creatures, as well as their actions, whether these be good or evil.

¹ Surah 9 Taubah Verse 39 – there are 39 other of this phrases in the Quran.

² Surah 22 Al Hajj Verse 18.

³ Surah 5 al Maidah Verse 1.

⁴ Surah 42 Ash-Shura Verse 11

“So blessed be Allah, the Best to create!”¹ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ.

“He guides whom He will”², يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ

and “leads whom He will astray,”³ وَيُضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ.

He gives to whom He will, and withholds from whom He will;
فَيَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ.

“He forgives whom He pleases, and punishes whom He pleases.”⁴
لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ.

“He is not questioned for His actions, but they will be questioned.”⁵

He created and provided for them, sent down Books and Messengers to guide them, all out of grace and kindness. To confess His unity and obey Him is an obligation upon His servants, transmitted through His Messengers. He is obligated to none, for He is the Possessor and Master of all; none shares sovereignty with Him, and none has any right over Him. He promises to reward those who act well proceeds from His grace. He warns that He will punish those who work with evil proceeds from His justice.

Only the Divine Omnipotence has all the above-mentioned attributes. He is Allah, and there is no God but He, (Exalted is He!). Because not a single one, let alone them all, can possibly be attributed to any other, Allah alone is Divine, and no other divinity exists.

Those who deny His divinity, or attribute divinity to other than Him, or give Him a partner therein, commit an immense falsehood and are overwhelmed by loss. They are the ones referred to in Allah’s statement (and Mighty is the Speaker!),

¹ Surah 22 Al-Mukminum Versse14

² Surah 10 Yunus Verse 25

³ Surah 13 arRad Verse 27.

⁴ Surah 2 al Baqara Verse 284.

⁵ Surah 21 Al Anbiyaa Verse 23.

وَلَقَدْ ذَرَأْنَا لِجَهَنَّمَ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الْجِنِّ وَالإِنسِ هُمْ قُلُوبٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ آذَانٌ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا أُولَئِكَ كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ، أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْعَافِيُونَ.

“Many are the Jinns and men we have made for Hell: They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith yet see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle,- nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning).”¹

Polytheism [*Shirk*]

You should know that this Noble Phrase has two halves. The first is a negation, and (in His words) He says, [*La ilaha*] ﴿لَا إِلَهَ﴾ “There is no God”. The other is an affirmation and (in His words) He says, [*illalla*] ﴿إِلَّا اللّٰهُ﴾ “other than Allah”. When a negation followed by a confirmation is uttered by someone who takes as a partner no other deity to Allah, this means that he has denied and refuted the illusion of the polytheists that there may be another divinity. This also means that the essence of Unification that his heart contains will be reinforced. For it is actively strengthened by the repetition of these words. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him, said, “Renew your faith by saying phrases *La ilaha illalla*, ﴿لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللّٰهُ﴾ “There is no God other than Allah.”

Thus also there are subtle and hidden varieties of shirk, which are escaped only by gnostics of authority and those who have the vision and are able to see the pure truth beyond the veil. Some believers may unwittingly fall prey to some of these varieties. They may, for instance, believe that someone besides Allah may

¹ Surah 7 Al Ar’aaf Verse 179.

independently bring them to benefit or preserve them from misfortunes; whilst other attitudes in the same category include avidity for power and love of superiority over other creations. The love of being unrestrained, and independent and passion for social importance, eminence and praise, both in people's hearts and in their speech.

In a Hadith narrated,

الشِّرْكُ فِي أُمَّتِي أَحْفَى مِنْ دَيْبِ النَّمْلِ

“Shirk is more hidden in my nation than the footfalls of ants.”

Also, he, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, said,

الرِّيَاءُ الشِّرْكُ الْأَصْغَرُ.

“Showing-off is called the smaller Shirk.”

In this context, a man may take as partner himself or someone else to Allah and not aware of it. Believers should, therefore, do their utmost to guard themselves against these hidden forms of polytheism, just as they defend themselves against its manifest kind.

Then in this sense polytheism [*shirk*] does not compromise the basis of faith upon which salvation depends, but it does compromise its perfection.

We said at the beginning of this section that when denying divinity to any other than Allah, it is incumbent upon the monotheist [*muwahhidin*] to refute those who have the illusion to other than Allah, whether they are polytheists or anyone else of similar orientation. We called their false beliefs ‘illusions’ since they arise from false conceptions and feeble thinking, and indicate that their constitution has become corrupted and their intellect diminished. For otherwise, how can the existence of Him by Whom all things are manifested not be evident to anyone possessed of sight and hearing, let alone one possessed of insight and the [faculty of the] heart? However, (in the Exalted words),

وَمَنْ يُضِلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ. وَمَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُضِلٍّ.

“For such as Allah leaves to stray, there can be no guide. And such as Allah doth guide there can be none to lead astray”¹.

They are those (in His, the Exalted words),

ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ. صُمُّ بُكْمٌ عُمِي فَهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ.

“Allah took away their light and left them in utter darkness. So they could not see. Deaf, dumb, and blind, they will not return (to the path).”²

(The imam said) by Allah, in man’s words,

أَيَا عَجَبًا كَيْفَ يُعْصَى الْإِلَٰهَ أَوْ كَيْفَ يَجْحَدُهُ الْجَا حِدُ؟

O wonder! How can God be disobeyed

Or by the thankless have His name denied?

وَفِي كُلِّ شَيْءٍ لَهُ آيَةٌ تَدُلُّ عَلَى أَنَّهُ وَاحِدٌ

In everything and movement is His sign,

All stillness traces that our guide to His Oneness.

وَاللَّهُ فِي كُلِّ تَحَرُّكَةٍ وَتَسْكِينَةٍ أَبَدًا شَاهِدٌ

Indeed Allah is in everything a sign is laid,

By which His Oneness always stand testified.

Some gnostics [*arifin*], may Allah make us benefit from them, once said, “A donkey has more knowledge of Allah than someone who seeks proof of His unity.”

Were it not for our concern for brevity, for reasons that Allah knows; we would have elaborated on this in such a way as would have taken aback intelligent and perspicacious men. And Allah is witness to what I say.



¹ Surah 39 Az-Zumar Verses 36-37.

² Surah 2 Al-Baqarah Verses 17-18.

Unification [*Tawhid*]

Scholars of authority, may Allah be pleased with them, said that Divinity is He who is rightful to be worshipped; and since the One who is rightfully to be worshipped is the Creator and the Provider of Provisions, and since the One who creates everything and provides for all beings is Allah the Exalted, He alone is the Divinity; He alone is to be worshipped, and no partner has He.

It is impossibility from both the logical reasoning and revelation, for the universe to have more than one God and thus what is from Allah, there is no god but He, the Exalted in Might, the Wise and in alluding to this impossibility, namely, that the universe may have two gods, Allah, the Exalted declares,

لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا.

“If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides Allah, there would have been confusion in both!”¹

مَا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ مِنْ وَلَدٍ وَمَا كَانَ مَعَهُ مِنْ إِلَهٍ، إِذَا لَذَهَبَ كُلُّ إِلَهٍ بِمَا خَلَقَ وَلَعَلَّ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ، سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ.

“No son did Allah beget, nor is there any god along with Him: (if there were many gods), behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have lorded it over others! Glory to Allah! (He is free) from the (sort of) things they attribute to Him!”²

No one ever claimed divinity in creating partnership to God as did Nimrod and Pharaoh, may Allah’s curse be upon them, nor was it ever claimed for any object, such as a star or a stone, without signs of imperfection, neediness, incapacity and subjugation (which are attributes which inevitably require contingency and servitude) being clearly manifest in both the human beings who claimed it for themselves, and the objects for which it was claimed.

¹ Surah 21 Al-Anbiyaa Verse 22.

² Surah 23 Al-Mukminum Verse 91.

Thus this is evident. It would appear that those who claimed to be a divine partner with Allah were driven by a corrupt illusion and false reasoning that arose when they beheld their own power over certain things. This is indicated in the saying of Allah the Exalted, in connection with Nimrod's disputation with (Ibrahim) the Friend of Allah [*al-khalil*], upon him be peace, about his Lord,

قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّيَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ قَالَ أَنَا أُحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ.

“Abraham said, “My Lord is He who gives life and death.” He (Nimrod) said, “I give life and death.””¹

In one of the Quranic commentaries [*Tafsir*] that in order to prove his untenable claim, Nimrod brought two men, executed one of them, and spared the other. And, Glory be to Him, had a similar description whereby Pharoah told his people,

يَا قَوْمِ أَلَيْسَ لِي مُلْكُ مِصْرَ وَهَذِهِ الْأَنْهَارُ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِي أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ.

“O my people, does not the Kingdom of Egypt belong to me, (witness) this river flowing underneath my (palace)? Do you not see?”²

It is unlikely that these two accursed ones were unaware of the falsity of their claims, but were driven by arrogance, thanklessness and ingratitude thus claim for themselves that which was not rightfully theirs, and the folly of their followers who submitted to their authority gave them the opportunity to do so. Allah, the Exalted, says of Pharoah,

فَاسْتَحَفَّ قَوْمَهُ فَأَطَاعُوهُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ.

“Thus did he make fools of his people, and they obeyed him: truly were they a people corrupt and rebellious (against Allah).”³

Thus we were informed that when the Nile became low, and his people asked him to make it rise for them, he took them out [to its banks], hid from their sight, and then began to rub his face in the dust

¹ Surah 2 Al-Baqarah Verse 258.

² Surah 43 Az-Zukhruf Verse 51.

³ Surah 43 Az-Zukhruf Verse 54.

and implore, beseech and pray to Allah. Thus Allah, by His power made the Nile flow, that He might further entangle His enemy. Then at this, Pharoah said to his people, “It is I who caused it to flow for you!” This confirmed what we have just said. Although there are hidden matters within these words, again which one is not allowed to record in books.

You should know that what we have written in these sections overlaps. We have deliberately omitted any mention of the grammatical analysis of the phrase, and its status in the Laws and Merits. The above point lies outside our present purpose.

While as far as the latter the Laws and Merits are concerned, it should be a sufficient exposition to say that the lives and wealth of those who reject it are unprotected and that they shall remain forever in the fire of Hell. Whereas a man who lives as a disbeliever for seventy years, for instance, and then utters it with faith, renders his life and wealth sacrosanct, and will slough off his sins and become as pure as the day his mother gave him birth. A servant who meets Allah the Exalted with as many sins as all the ancient and recent peoples combined, but who does not advise any partner to Allah, will be forgiven if Allah wills, or else punished for his sins; but this punishment will be temporary since none of the people of Unification [*tawhid*] will remain in hell forever. The meaning of this Noble Phrase is to consolidate this belief. In a hadith narrated,

أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَقَاتِلَ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَشْهَدُوا أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، وَيَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ، فَإِذَا فَعَلُوا ذَلِكَ فَقَدْ عَصَمُوا مِنِّي دِمَاءَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ، إِلَّا بِحَقِّ الْإِسْلَامِ وَحِسَابُهُمْ عَلَى اللَّهِ.

“I was commanded to do battle against people until they bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that I am the Messenger of Allah, then establish the Prayer and pay the Zakat. When they do this, they protect themselves from me their lives and their wealth, except for the rights of Islam, and their accountability is before Allah.”

And in another hadith,

مَنْ كَانَ آخِرُ كَلَامِهِ: لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ

“Whoever says ‘There is no god but Allah’ as his last words shall enter the Garden.”

And there is another (hadith that narrates),

وَلَيْسَ عَلَى أَهْلِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْشَةٌ فِي قُبُورِهِمْ، وَلَا فِي نُشُورِهِمْ، وَكَأَنِّي بِهِمْ وَقَدْ خَرَجُوا مِنْ قُبُورِهِمْ يَنْفُضُونَ التُّرَابَ مِنْ رُؤُسِهِمْ، يَقُولُونَ. ﴿الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَذْهَبَ عَنَّا الْحَزْنَ إِنَّ رَبَّنَا لَعَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ﴾

“The people who uttered “There is no god but Allah” do not feel estrangement in their graves, nor when they are resurrected. It is as though I am with them when they rose from their graves, shaking the dust from their heads and saying, “Praised be to Allah, Who has removed from us all sorrow; for our Lord is indeed Oft-Forgiving, Compassionate and Ready to Appreciate (service)¹.”

And in another (hadith that narrates),

أَنَّهُ يُصَاحُّ بِرَجُلٍ فْتَمَدُّ لَهُ تِسْعَةُ وَتِسْعُونَ سِجْلًا مِنَ الْخَطَايَا، كُلُّ سِجْلٍ مَدُّ الْبَصَرِ فَنُطْرَحَ فِي كِفَّةِ السَّيِّئَاتِ، فَيَقُولُ الْحَقُّ: إِنَّ لَكَ عِنْدَنَا حَسَنَةً، فَنُخْرِجُ لَهُ بِطَاقَةً مَكْتُوبَةٌ فِيهَا: لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ فَنُطْرَحُ فِي الْكِفَّةِ الْأُخْرَى، فَنُزَجَّحَ بِالسَّجَّالَاتِ كُلِّهَا.

“Verily a man shall be called, then ninety-nine scrolls containing his sins shall be unfolded before him, each stretching as far as his eye can see, and these are set on the pan of the Scales which contains his evil deeds. He, the True Reality then says, “You have a good deed in Our record!” A small scroll is then brought to him, on which it is written: “There is no god but Allah.” This is cast onto the other pan, and outweighs all the rest combined.”

Sheikh ibn Atha’ailah has mentioned some of the merits of this Phrase in his book “The Key to Success”.

¹ Surah 35 Faatir Verse 34.

Then the benefits and advantages which attach to this Phrase, whether yielded in this world or in the hereafter, can never be attained by anyone who separates the Two Testimonies, for their status is identical and together as one.

Those who comply in the Testimony of Unity and yet deny that of the Messenger do not belong to the people of Unification, and similarly the speech of those who disbelieve the prophet yet believe in the Oneness of Allah the Exalted.

However, for the believer in the Oneness of Allah [*Tawhid*] and the Messengership, there is no harm for him to say, “There is no god but Allah,” and not immediately follow it up with the testimony of Messengership: he will not miss any of the blessings which attach to this Phrase. So be aware of this!

This subject ramifies into branches and subtleties which would need more than a whole volume if thoroughly pursued; our aim has been only to indicate a few of the meanings of the Phrase of Unification.



Sequel

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

There is no god but Allah A Recipe for Remembrance [*dhikr*]

You should know that this Phrase is the most comprehensive and rewarding of all invocations; the nearest to bringing about the Opening and illumining the heart with the light of Allah. It is also the most suitable of invocations for all people since it encompasses the meanings of all other invocations, such as “Praise and Thanks be to Allah” [*Alhamdulillah* or *Tahmid*], Glory belongs to Allah [*Subhanallah* or *Tasbih*] and so on. It is incumbent upon each believer to make it part of his integral reflection [*wird*], his constant remembrance [*dhikr*], and together with this, it is incumbent upon him not to abandon the other prescribed invocations of each of which he should have a reflection.

Verily, the servant (of Allah) is either a traveller or an arriver or a non-traveller. Thus they are three categories, and all three should hold unceasingly to this invocation.

For the travellers and those non-travellers, since they perceive objects and attribute to them an existence of their own something which may lead to subtle forms of hidden shirk, they can only expel these from their souls by continually repeating this Phrase.

As for the man who has arrived, this invocation is again the most appropriate for him, because although he perceives things as come from Allah, and unceasingly summons them to Allah, the Exalted, he is not entirely free from understanding his own self from time to time, and from guilty thoughts unworthy of his rank.

Then we were informed that Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, may Allah be pleased with him, used to insert this Phrase into his conversation: he would utter a few words, say “There is no god but Allah” and then resume what he was saying. This pertains to the Station of Subsistence [*baaqa*] (final objective) which follows that of Extinction (of this Live) [*fana*] (our current state on earth). As we said earlier, there is no invocation more appropriate for a man continually to use than this.

Yes, indeed when the traveller of the path reaches the initial stages of extinction [*fana*] and is liberated from perceiving any of the worlds as autonomous, then the most appropriate thing for him at that time is to repeat calling on ‘Allah’ ‘Allah’. This is what the people of gnosis have advised.

All the above is from the point of view of choosing the best and most appropriate alternative, for otherwise, all the invocations are paths leading to Allah.

The teachers [*sheikhs*], may Allah be pleased with them, have many methods of uttering this honourable Phrase, whether aloud or silently, and have set conditions to need to fulfil whereby the invoker who would expose himself to the Divine effulgence and Opening Doors to Allah. These are explained in detail in their treatises which deal with them individually, whereby they can be found by whoever wishes to tread the path of such men.

It is best that those who are able to find in their time a sheikh of authority should receive these from him directly since books are the last resort for those who are unable to find (such a teacher) and what a difference there is between a man who receives the Path from a gnostic of authority who will take him to Allah, and one who only seeks to the path from a book!

Allah guides to what is right. To Him is the return, and success is from Him and in His Hand.



Chapter Two

The Presence of Allah

You have asked, “What ‘Forcible Presence’ means?”

Now, firstly you should know that the original nature of man is to be free of heart, ready to receive whatever comes to him, whether it is that which reforms and enlightens him, or that which brings him corruption and darkness. It is the thing which reaches him first, which establishes and inscribes itself within him, and he will need to strive and exert himself forcibly to be able to efface it.

The first thing to reach the hearts of the children of Adam, except those whom Allah preserves, is the knowledge of the affairs of their worldly surrounding and its affairs, and of the things they do to live and take pleasure therein; these are the first things that they hear and see from their own kind.

Once if these things have seized their hearts, there comes to them the knowledge of Allah and see the rights of Lordship that are His, and they are then requested to fulfil these rights as befits the Holy Presence, they find in their hearts no space for them to dwell and be established; they thus remain shaky and weakly ingrained. The one who aspires for the firm establishment of the knowledge of Allah in his heart, and for presence with Him during his ordinary activities and in all circumstances to become his custom and sign, will inevitably need to erase the knowledge of worldly affairs that had first entered his heart and which distracts him from devoting himself to this matter and achieving it fully.

It is again inevitable that he suffer hardship during his necessary self-discipline and [*mujahadatan*] the battling against his ego. These could be easy, or it could difficult; they vary in their fullness according to what Allah bestows upon the person's nature [*fitra*]. And varies in power according to the variations in his orientation and determination, and to the degree in which the dangerous things which have taken over the heart are established therein.

What we have just said does not apply only to present, but uses more generally to the processes of acquiring all the praiseworthy attributes which are the source of good works. The man who wishes to receive these states [*hal*] not only needs an effort at the beginning but they must come with good deeds and hardship; then the matter evolves until they are accompanied by pleasure and repose.

Having learnt this, you should know that presence with Allah is the very spirit and purpose of all acts of worship; it is what those of authority are concerned with and what the gnostic stress.

Allah's servants perform the actions while in a state of distraction are considered by them more likely to result in punishment and veiling than in contemplation and reward.

The way to attain to presence with Allah in acts of worship is for a man to watch for and dispel whatever may distract him. There are two kinds of distraction: those which come through the senses, including hearing and vision, which are dispersed through seclusion [*khalwat*], and, secondly, those which arise from the whisperings of the ego (self) [*nafs*], which distract the heart with various insinuations and passing thoughts, which are dispelled by ignoring them.

And keeping the heart occupied, either by echoing in the heart the same word that the mouth is uttering, whether it be Qur'an or invocation.

Or by listening to and hearing what proceeds from the mouth. The important thing in such situations is to control and guard the heart against everything that reaches it, whether from the self [*nafs*] or the senses.

When the servant achieves mastery in this degree of forcible presence he should move on to the degree which lies above it, namely, that of perceiving and holding in his heart the meaning of what is proceeding from his tongue, for instance, the Oneness of Allah in *Tawhid* [Allahu] via *Tahlil* “There is no god but Allah” [*la ilaha illalla*]. Just as He is Transcendence and Magnificent are found in Praising and Glorifying Him in *Tasbih* [*subhanallah*] and acknowledged His Greatness in *Takbir* [Allahu Akbar].

If the tongue is reading the Qur'an, then the meaning of what is being recited should be present in the heart. When the heart attained what is being recited, then this is above the noble state of presence, indeed, after this state which ranks higher still is when the heart is present and feels (the connection) during recitation of the Quran, worship and remembrance and invocation in the Presence of He Who is being worshipped, spoken and invoked to.

This is indicated by the saying of the Prophet, upon who be blessings and peace,

الإِحْسَانُ: أَنْ تَعُدَّ بِاللهِ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ.

“Excellence [*ihsan*] is to worship Allah as though you saw Him.”

Those who wish to attain this formidable status of contemplation must thoroughly complete the steps which precede it, as we said before, and fully affirm that the Real Allah, the Creator transcends all contingencies; for a man lacking in insight may compromise this transcendence with false imaginings, the like of which the Real far exceeds. At this degree, which is to contemplate the Speaker in His words, and the Remembered in His remembrance, there is absence, absorption, and extinction, and other such states as are found among those blessed with the Creator's presence.

Whoever wishes to arrive, let him travel the path, embrace patience and resolution, and roll up his sleeves to devote all his effort and ability to his quest, and let him heed the words of the ‘Master of the Faction’, al-Junaid, may Allah mercy be upon him, who, when asked how he had acquired so many sciences which none of his sheikhs had possessed, pointed to a stair in his house, and said, “By sitting under that stair with Allah for thirty years.”

It was the custom of al-Shibli, may Allah's mercy be upon him, at the outset of his spiritual career, to take a bundle of wooden twigs and seclude himself in an underground dwelling, where, whenever distraction overtook him he would take one and strike himself with it. By the end of the night, he would have struck himself enough times to use up the whole bundle. For indeed, the beginning of the unveilings [*mukishafa*] and contemplation [*mushahada*] that they were able to attain was the effort they made [*mujahada*] and the hardship they endured. Even though these things may be achieved without such effort and difficulty; this is, in fact, extremely rare.

The man who reaches the degree of presence and intimacy with Allah then has actually to force himself to attend to the created world or to become involved much worldly matter when this is necessary for him. At this, his state will have been turned around, from one of forcing himself to be present with Allah, to one of forcing himself to attend to the world.

One of the most significant supports to the achievement of presence with Allah is for the servant to make his heart feel that Allah sees him, his heart, and his inner intention and orientation, rather than his body and the outward form of his actions alone.

Gnostics teach that one of the factors that disturb one's presence with Allah during the ritual prayer or remembrance [*dhikr*] is for one's heart to be occupied with things other than the Hereafter. They hold that the important thing is to concentrate all one's outward and inner aspect on whatever activity one is engaging in for the sake of Allah the Exalted, for it will never be accomplished correctly and masterfully unless this is done.

The distraction of the heart may even damage the outward form of the act, and not just its inner meaning, as we sometimes see. When presence is not forcibly striven for, acts of worship performed in a state of distraction do not lead one on to a state of existence, although they do not entirely lack in blessings.

A man once said to Abi Hafsen, "I invoke Allah, but achieve no presence". Then someone replies to him, "You should thank and praise Allah who is adorning one part of you with His remembrance."

Chapter Three

Explications

You have also asked about what it means to attribute transcendence and praise to Allah, and, also about how one should express one's denial of one's own ability and power, about the meaning of remorse, and asking for forgiveness, and whether these are exclusive to those who commit sins or general enough to include the ascent from one noble spiritual station to a higher one.

التَّسْبِيحُ وَالتَّحْمِيدُ

Transcendence [*Tasbih*] and Praiseworthy [*Tahmid*]

You should know that to attribute Transcendence is to attribute holiness as well as exaltation. Its meaning is for the heart to be convinced that in His Essence, Attributes and Acts, the Truly Majestic and High is He! transcends all resemblance to created beings. He is Holy, Transcendent, and High above partners, likenesses, contingencies which begin and end, aims and causes, and limits of time and location. He transcends any form that may arise in one's mind or imagination, and is beyond being apprehended by thought; for what He is lies beyond the scope of intelligence and the reach of knowledge.

Exaltation [*Tasbih*] is often mentioned in the Qur'an when the Real disassociated Himself from everything that deviators attribute to Him, that is unworthy of His impregnable perfection. Examples of these include, He, the Exalted, says,

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ وَلَا تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ، إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ أَلْقَاهَا إِلَى مَرْيَمَ وَرُوحٌ مِنْهُ، فَآمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ، وَلَا تَقُولُوا ثَلَاثَةً، انْتَهُوا خَيْرًا لَكُمْ، إِنَّمَا اللَّهُ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ، سُبْحَانَهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُ وَلَدٌ.

“O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His messengers. Say not “Trinity”: desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son.”¹

Another example is His (Exalted is He) saying,

اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهْبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا، لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ، سُبْحَانَهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ.

“They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of Allah, and (they take as their Lord) Christ the son of Mary; yet they were commanded to worship but One Allah: there is no god but He. Praise and glory to Him: (Far is He) from having the partners they associate (with Him).”²

Another example is His (Exalted is He) saying,

أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ مِنْ إِفْكِهِمْ لَيَقُولُونَ. وَلَدَ اللَّهُ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ. أَصْطَفَى الْبَنَاتِ عَلَى الْبَنِينَ. مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ. أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ. أَمْ لَكُمْ سُلْطَانٌ مُبِينٌ. فَأْتُوا بِكِتَابِكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ. وَجَعَلُوا بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ الْجَنَّةِ نَسَبًا، وَلَقَدْ عَلِمَتِ الْجِنَّةُ إِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ. سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ.

“Is it not that they say, from their own invention.? “Allah has begotten

¹ Surah 4 an-Nisaa Verse 171.

² Surah 9 at-Tawbah Verse 31.

children?” But they are liars! Did He (then) choose daughters rather than sons? What is the matter with you? How do you judge? Will you not then receive admonition? Or have you an authority manifest? Then you bring your Book (of authority) if you are truthful! And they have invented a blood-relationship between Him and the Jinns: but the Jinns know (quite well) that they have indeed to appear (before his Judgment-Seat)! Glory to Allah! (He is free) from the things they ascribe to Him!”¹

As for “praise” [*thanaa*], this is to laud and praise, in other words, to make mention of the qualities of perfection that befit the Praised One, His attributes of loftiness, nobility and majesty, and the gifts and attainments that flow from Him to those who praise Him as well as to others, and His protection of them against various kinds of hardships and opposition. All of these things are to be accompanied by reverence and awe. One of the acts of worship that most completely contains the various aspects of praise is to utter the phrase,

“All Praise and Thanks belong to Allah” [*al-Hamdu lillah*]. الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ

And you should know that Allah the Exalted is the only one who is absolutely transcendent and worthy of praise, in every way and in all senses. This is uniquely and exclusively His, since He is free from all imperfections, and to Him belongs the whole of perfection because He is the Source of all good; and every attainment, transcendence and praise is real only in His case, and merely symbolic for others.

In effect, neither transcendence nor praise can ever be genuinely attributed to another, literally or metaphorically; for any creature who either achieves a kind of transcendence or does something which is deserving of praise, never does so by his own power and ability, but only by Allah’s power, will, grace, and mercy; which come from Allah and belong to Him.

The attributing by some people of transcendence by praising or extolling a created being who is indeed free of that which they say

¹ Surah 37 As-Saffaat Verse 151 to 159.

he is free of is, but the manifestation of the imperfection that belongs to this being's kind. And when they praise him for a quality of perfection that is actually his, they are but attributing transcendence and praise to Allah. This is known to some people, and entirely unknown to others.

You should also know that Allah, the Exalted, stands in no need of anyone's attribution of transcendence or praise to Him. Those who do so neither free Him from imperfections for He has none.

And it is inconceivable that he has any nor establish His perfection by their praise, for perfection was ever His, and eternally remains so. The man who attributes transcendence to his Lord, and praises Him, is only attracting benefits and good to himself; and Allah, in His grace, has promised this to him.

The Prophet may blessings and peace be upon him, said,
 الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ تَمْلَأُ الْمِيزَانَ وَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ تَمْلَأَانِ أَوْ تَمْلَأُ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ.

“Praise and Thanks belong to Allah fills the Scales, and Glory to Allah (Transcendence is Allah) and Praise and Thanks belongs to Allah fills the distance between heaven and earth.”

And may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him also said,
 إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَيَرْضَى عَنِ الْعَبْدِ يَأْكُلُ الْأَكْلَةَ فَيَحْمَدُهُ عَلَيْهَا، وَيَشْرِبُ الشَّرْبَةَ فَيَحْمَدُهُ عَلَيْهَا.

“Indeed, Allah is pleased with a servant who, when he eats some food, praises and thanks to Him for it, and when he drinks a drink, praises and thanks to Him for it.”

The material bequeathed to us concerning Glorifying Allah and praising and thanking Allah is both too voluminous and well-known to be repeated here.

وَمَنْ جَاهَدَ فَإِنَّمَا يُجَاهِدُ لِنَفْسِهِ، إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَغَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ.

“And if any strive (with might and main), they do so for their own souls: for Allah is free of all needs from all creation.”¹

¹ Surah 29 Ankabut Verse 6

Power and Ability

الْحَوْلُ وَالْقُوَّةُ

You should know that the most comprehensive and inclusive formula for expressing the repudiation of anyone's own claim to power and ability is the expression,

لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ

“There is neither ability nor power except that of Allah, the Almighty.”

The Proof of Islam, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “Ability [*Hawla*] is motion, whilst ‘Power’ [*Quwwa*] is ability”. No creature possesses either ability or power over anything except through Allah, Who is Able and Capable. It is incumbent upon believers to have faith that in whatever Allah permits them to do or abstain from, as for instance, in conforming to an injunction, whether by acting or refraining, or in seeking their provision by resorting to action in the form of crafts and professions, and so on, it is Allah, the Exalted, Who creates and originates their intentions, abilities and movements; and that the acts they choose to perform will be attributed to them in the manner known as ‘acquisition’ and ‘working’, and shall be, in consequence, liable to reward and punishment; but that they exercise volition only when Allah Himself does so, and can neither do nor abstain from anything unless He renders them able to. Allah, the Exalted says,

لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيهِمَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ وَمَا لَهُ مِنْهُمْ مِنْ ظَهِيرٍ.

“They possess not even the weight of an atom in the heavens or on earth, not even any sort of share have they therein, nor is any of them a helper to Allah.”¹

¹ Surah 34 Saba Verse 22.

It is on the ability and power to make choices, which Allah has granted to His servants, that commands and prohibitions are based. Things which are done intentionally and by choice are attributed to them, and they are rewarded or punished accordingly.

لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

Hence the meaning of *la hawla wa la quuwata illa billah* is the denial of one's possession of autonomous ability and power, and the simultaneous confession of the existence of that seemingly ability and power to make choices that He gave to His servants to be their own.

He who claims that man has no choice or ability, that the acts he selects are identical with the acts he is compelled to do, and that he is in all circumstances coerced is a *Jabriya*¹ innovator whose false claim would deny that there was any purpose in sending Messengers and revealing Scriptures.

By contrast, he who claims that man possesses the will and power to do whatever he does by choice is a *Mu'tazilites*² innovator.

But he who believes that a responsible designate man possesses power and choice to allow him to comply with Allah's commands and prohibitions, but is neither independent thereby nor the creator of his own acts, has found the *Sunna*, and joined the majority of the community, and become safe from reprehensible innovation. There is a lengthy explanation to this, which follows a rugged road where many have slipped and gone astray; and beyond it is the secret of Destiny, which has always perplexed intelligent minds, and into which the Master of Messengers has commanded us not to delve.

So let the intelligent be content with hints, and make it suffice them to believe that everything was created by Allah, and nothing exists without His will and power. Then let the people require their selves [*nasf*] to conform to the commandments and prohibitions, and take their Lord's side against their selves [*nasf*] in every circumstance.

¹ *Jabriya* were a sect that denied free will.

² *Mu'tazilites* were a sect that diverged from Sunni Islam.

There is a hadith narration reported,

لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ كُنْزٌ مِنْ كُنُوزِ الْجَنَّةِ.

“*la hawla wa la quuwata illa billah* is one of the treasures of the Garden”.

Understand the indication contained in terming it a ‘treasure’, and you will know that its meaning is among the mysteries, for reward is of the same species as the act.

May Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him also said,

رَكَعَتَانِ فِي جَوْفِ اللَّيْلِ كُنْزُ الْبِرِّ

“Two prostrations [*raka’ats*] in the depths of the night are one of the treasures of goodness.”

This implies that their reward becomes a hidden treasure because the time of their good deed is in the night.

It is also narrated

لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ دَوَاءٌ مِنْ تِسْعَةِ وَتِسْعِينَ دَاءً أَذْنَاهَا أَهْمٌ.

“ ‘*La hawla wa la quuwata illa billah*’ is a remedy for ninety-nine ailments, the least of which is sorrow.”

It is a remedy for sorrow because grief mostly occurs when one misses something one loves, or when a distressful thing happens, and whenever either of these things occurs people perceive their helplessness and inability to achieve their desired aims; hence they feel sorrow. If at such times they repeat in their heart and with their tongues words which mean that they disclaim the possession of any ability or power of their own, then this gives them certitude in their knowledge that they are helpless and weak except where Allah gives them strength or power and capability or ability, with the result that their sorrow is banished, and their understanding or knowledge of their Lord is increased.

This can be clearly understood from the sayings of he, may blessings and peace be upon him,

مَنْ آمَنَ بِالْقَدَرِ ذَهَبَ هَمُّهُ

“Whoever believes in destiny, then one’s sorrow departs.”

And in attributing ability and power to His Name, Allah, which is the axis of the Names and the most supreme of them, and in following it on most occasions with the two noble Names which indicate two of the attributes of the Holy Essence, namely, those of Exaltation and Magnitude, lies a sign that He totally transcends and is absolutely holier than the illusions of those who have strayed from the path, are blind to the evidence, and have delved without insight into the secret of destiny and the acts of Allah’s creatures. So take heed!



Remorse and Seeking Forgiveness

النَّدَمُ وَالِاسْتِغْفَارُ

Remorse [*nadam*] is the turning of the heart, in sorrow and regret, away from something which the servant has committed, and which angers Allah the Exalted, such as sins or the neglect of obligatory acts. It may also occur following an excessive involvement in permissible pleasures or the negligence of supererogatory devotions.

Sincere remorse is one which leads to persevering in earnest and avoiding neglectfulness. When sound, it includes nearly all the conditions of repentance [*tawba*], which is why the Prophet has said, may blessings and peace be upon him,

“Remorse is repentance.” النَّدَمُ تَوْبَةٌ.

Those who are remorseful about their misbehaviour, but still persist in it are only jesting, and their remorse will not avail them.

Seeking forgiveness [*istighfar*] means asking Allah to forgive, which in turn means, His concealing the misdeed (from the eyes of others). When Allah, by His grace, forgives a sin, he neither exposes its doer to shame nor punishes him for it, whether in this world or in the next.

The highest kind of forgiveness is for Allah to place a veil, a barrier, between the servant and sins until it is as though he were free of them. In the context of Prophethood this veil is termed ‘infallible’ and in that of sainthood, ‘protection’. This is the meaning of Allah the Exalted saying, addressed to the (Prophet) Master of the Infallible may the best of blessings and peace be upon him,

وَأَسْتَغْفِرُ لَذَنْبِكَ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ.

“Ask forgiveness for your fault and for believing men and women.”¹

لِيَغْفِرَ لَكَ اللَّهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِكَ وَمَا تَأَخَّرَ.

¹ Surah 49 Muhammad Verse 19.

“That Allah may forgive you your past sin and those to follow;”¹

It is well known that the Prophet was not liable to sin. But He here reminds him of Allah favouring him with His protection from everything that would distance him from Allah, and yet commands him to invoke to Him in that manner; for indeed invocation in this context being the consequence of thankfulness, and thankfulness being the cause of the further increase.

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ.

“If ye are grateful, I will add more (favours) for you.”²

وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ.

And Allah knows best.

[*Wallahu Alam*].



¹ Surah 48 Al-Fath Verse 2.

² Surah 14 Ibrahim Verse 7.

A Note of Caution!

دَقِيقَة

A Subtle Gradation of Sins

You should know that although obedience is the path to Allah and the means of approach to His Holy Presence, it may induce in those who are liable to distraction many things which are reckoned among the major sins, such as ostentation, self-admiration, arrogance, the feeling that one has obliged Allah, forgetfulness of His grace in granting (acts of obedience) and so forth.

These may result in the deprivation of the obedient man's reward, and may even lead to painful punishment.

The believer who is intent on following the path of seriousness and is concerned to attain salvation should always accuse his own soul [*nafs*] and refuse to give it the benefit of the doubt; he will ask forgiveness even for his acts of obedience, yet if no contravention has outwardly occurred, fearful that his soul may have led him into one of these hazardous faults. You now know why one should seek forgiveness, even for acts of obedience!

Something even more subtle than this may befall the people of gnosis under some circumstances: they may notice that they have come to find comfort in their virtuous acts (rather than in Allah) or to rely on them (rather than on Allah) and they then turn back to Him in repentance, asking for forgiveness.

The same things may again befall them while they pass through the noble stations and states with which they are invested, and they have then to repent and ask forgiveness for them.

For the people of Allah who divest themselves of all attachment to the worlds, sin is to attend to other than Allah, whatever this 'other' maybe. We see them fleeing fearfully to Allah and seeking

refuge in Him from states which, if experienced by others, would have been considered great acts of devotion, such as, for instance, setting one's hopes in one's acts of obedience and having thoughts of fear of Allah or of renunciation. It is in this context that you should understand the saying,

حَسَنَاتُ الْأَبْرَارِ سَيِّئَاتُ الْمُفْرِّينَ.

“The good deeds of the righteous are like the evil deeds of those close to Allah.”

Was it not that the Path is fading away and the lights of realization are setting, we would have said some astonishing things on this subject. So take heed, O people of intelligence!

Sheikh Shihabul Din al-Suhrawardi, a great *Sufi* of Bagdad, may Allah have mercy upon him said, “There are certain factors which impair spiritual stations, for this latter, maybe infiltrated by extraneous elements, and the gnostic may fail to perceive this while still in them, and only become aware of this upon rising from one station to a higher one, at which, experiencing an imperfection, he looks back at the former with better insight, and returns to it in order to repair the defect to render it sound. This can only be done through repentance and asking for forgiveness.”

This is a summary of what the gnostics have taught, with some explanations and clarifications. Some have interpreted the saying of the Prophet, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him,

إِنَّهُ لِيُعَانُ عَلَى قَلْبِي حَتَّى أَسْتَغْفِرَ اللَّهَ فِي الْيَوْمِ سَبْعِينَ مَرَّةً.

“My heart becomes covered, such that I ask Allah for forgiveness seventy times in a day.”

Along the lines suggested by Suhrawardi, but in fact, it is far from bearing any relation whatever to the *Muhammadan* rank which embrace all perfection of form and character. I have another interpretation for it, which I can only divulge verbally to those worthy to receive it.

وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ.

And Allah knows best.

Chapter Four

Whom We Perceive Ourselves as Receiving From

You inquire about how one should judge, according to religious criteria, a man of the Path who says, “Those who receive from the hands of other creatures must be receiving from Allah, and this by unveiling and tasting, not by faith and knowledge?”

These are the words of a gnostic speaking of his personal state and expressing what he beholds. It is the state of someone who is extinct to everything that is other than Allah, absorbed in the contemplation of His majesty and beauty, conscious of no creature, neither feeling nor perceiving anything that exists, deprived of the ability to dispose and choose, no longer perceiving the traces, his secret immersed in the depths of the ocean of secrets, the dark night that is existence effaced by the dawning of the day that is the object of his contemplation. You behold him behaving with his Lord as the dead body behaves towards its washer, only moving when He moves him. He has lost awareness of all causes by beholding the Causer of all purposes and is extinct to other than Him through seeing the act of the One Who chooses and acts. As a noble gnostic once remarked,

لِلَّهِ دُرٌّ فَتَى حَيْرَانَ ذَا وَلَهٍ أَفْنَى مَسَمَاهُ مَوْلَاهُ وَأَسْمَاهُ
يَمْضِي الزَّمَانُ وَلَا يَدْرِي بَعْدَتِهِ يَسْتَفُّ مِنْ رَائِقِ الْعُذْرِيِّ حُمِيَّاهُ

Great is Allah such that bewildered youth, perplexed

Whose Lord has extinguished his name and raised him up
Time passes, and he knows not its reckoning,
as he is made to quaff the wine.

A man in this state has been overwhelmed and overmastered by what he is contemplating. He is unable to avoid whatever spiritual condition that comes to him in this state, while Allah guards and protects him in whatever proceeds from him while in that condition. Those who are sincere in these situations never indulge in anything which is contrary to the attributes of divine servitude, even though they stand under no legal responsibility since they have lost those powers of discrimination upon which legal obligation depends.

The people who achieved realization, may Allah be pleased with them, are incredibly eager to receive and hold this wand, because in it they depart from the physical forms of dense existence; and their human attributes, which are the veil which lies between them and the contemplation of the divine secrets, are effaced.

You should know that this state, even should it come, does not persist. If it does, strange things will become manifest in the servant, and he may finally reach the condition of fading and vanishing. This is divine favour bestowed by Allah upon whom He will, and is not to be attained by hopes and the illusions of the self [*nafs*].

Nonetheless, a man can render himself receptive to it by means of proper self-discipline and sincere striving, in conformity to the Book (Quran) and the *Sunna*.

A man who merely pretends to be in this condition and to possesses the attributes proper to those who have attained it is deluded and will be held to account, for because of it he will have left unfulfilled some of the rights which both Allah and creation have upon him. For it is one of the attributes of the mortal man that he cannot be conceived of as loving, fearing or expecting anything from any created being. He will neither thank nor reward any being for a service rendered to him, because he sees none but Allah, other than this is to attributes the actions of the mortal to Allah.

You should know that the mortal man sees Allah and does not see creation! While for the man of subsistence [*baqa*], there is no subsistence before the occurrence of real extinction [*fana*] sees things

by Allah, and therefore gives each his due, puts each element in its appropriate place, and fulfil to perfection the rights of the Real as well as those of creation; and this neither distracts him from his Lord nor veils him from his station.

The mortal man may be subject to flashes of subsistence and the man of subsistence [*baqa*] to flashes of human extinction [*fana*]; while the actual spiritual state of a man is that which he experiences most of the time. You hear of men who have reached the state of subsistence, and yet about whom things are related that bear witness to absorption and extinction; for instance, that which we hear about Sheikh Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili, may Allah be pleased with him, when he once said in an assembly, “We love none but Allah!”

Once someone said, “Your ancestor, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him, said, جُبِلَتْ الْقُلُوبُ عَلَى حُبِّ مَنْ أَحْسَنَ إِلَيْهَا. “Hearts are given an intrinsic nature to love those who are good to them.”

To which the Sheikh replied, “We do not see a doer of good apart from Allah; if we must, then as a cloud of dust which you take for something until you examine it more closely, and find it to be nothing at all.” By this, he meant that such was the manner in which he saw creation.

To express the experience of those who see only Allah, in both the act of giving and that of withholding, is difficult; language can hardly stretch that far. However, one can recognize the possessor of such a station by its outwardly manifest signs.

The essential and indispensable thing, when receiving anything from the hand of a created being, is to do so with both knowledge [*alem*] and courtesy [*adab*], both inward and outward. Outward knowledge implies that you must accept only that which is acceptable in the law [*shariah*], while ‘inward’ [*batin*] experience means that you take nothing when possessing enough, except with the intention of giving it away; and accept nothing that your ego expectantly desires.

The meaning of ‘expectant desire’ here is hoping and hankering after something from a particular source. Suppressing this is part of inner courtesy, to conform to which is a virtue. The obligation connected to inward knowledge is to know with certainty that the real giver is Allah the Exalted, for He is the One Who gave to the one who gave to you, commanded him to give, and will reward him with what is nobler and more excellent than what he gave. He is the One Who cast in his heart the irresistible urges which he could not rescind, made the act of providing pleasant to him, made the thought of you occur to his mind, and inspired him with the belief that there were goodness and benefit in doing you a favour; while in reality, he did a favour only to himself.

Now, tell me, can one perceive created beings, or abide with them, as long as one has this particular knowledge of Allah? Nonetheless, never fail to thank those who render you a service; be kind to them and pray for them, for indeed, Glorious be Him has commanded us to do so. He only made them the instruments of benevolent acts, locations for goodness, mediators between Him and His servants, because it pleased Him that these are theirs, and it pleases Him that they are treated accordingly. When you thank them, you are in reality thanking Allah.

Now we have said this, and you have come to know the rules which govern those who take from the hands of created beings, whether they are people of the path (wayfaring), mortals or subsistence. Take these rules firmly and act accordingly.

A Caution! دَقِيقَةٌ

The author of the book Nourishment for Hearts, (Abu Talib Al Makki) may Allah show him His mercy, and may we benefit by him, said, “If you find, to receive a favour of yours, a man of certainty who sees nothing but Allah, seize the opportunity to do him a favour! Even if his state forces him neither to thank you nor to pray for you, since he does not even see you, his certainty will be more profitable, and weigh more in your balance, than the prayers and thanks of someone else.”

Chapter Five

Reciting Surah Waqiah

Then you asked,

“What is the disposition [*tertib*] of reciting Surah Waqiah?”

Now you should know that the following account [*hadith*] has been narrated in this regard,

أَنْ قَرَأْتَهَا كُلَّ لَيْلَةٍ أَمَانٌ مِنَ الْفَقَاةِ،

“To read it each night is to be free from want (poverty).”

That is, to be independent of other creations, that is the kind of ‘dependence’ meant here being that which shames a man, both in his worldly affairs and in his manly virtue.

When Ibn Masud, may Allah be pleased with him, was told on his deathbed that he had left his children in poverty, he replied, “I gave each of them a treasure, it is the Surah al-Waqiah.”

The unique attributes of certain Surahs and Verses of the Qur’an and those of the Prophetic Invocations and Prayers are not unknown. The books of hadith are full of them.

Imam al-Ghazali wrote an entire book on the subject, entitling it, “Unalloyed Gold - The Properties of the Majestic Book.”

The regular recitation of al-Waqiah and other Surahs of the similar type bring benefit to oneself and ward off worldly harm, does not compromise one’s intentions or actions. Nonetheless, the motive should not be entirely lacking in religious purpose, since for a servant

deliberately to guard himself against depending on others is the best of intentions.

For an intelligent believer will not intend, in wanting independence from others and safety for himself and his family, those things which are associated with physical comfort and pleasure; instead, his intention will be to free himself from whatever may damage him religiously, of the things which can be seen in many people who suffer from such afflictions.

This is why the great men of Allah are always keenly occupied with asking Him to safeguard the wellbeing [*aafiya*] of both their souls and their bodies, being fearful of the manner and nature of their souls, which weak and wavering by nature, respond when faced with things that are repellant to them.

The Messenger may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, repeatedly sought protection against poverty and sickness. He said,

كَادَ الْفَقْرُ أَنْ يَكُونَ كُفْرًا.

“Poverty is not far from being disbelief!”

Because people afflicted with it are liable to feel dissatisfied with Allah's decree, or angered against Divine providence; or at least assailed by some form of anxiety.

Sufyin al-Thawri may Allah show him His mercy, once said, “I do not fear hardships because of the pain they cause me; but I fear that were I to be afflicted with hardship, I might fall prey to disbelief.”

Perfection for the servant lies in his being content with his Lord's choices on his behalf, in sufficing himself with His knowledge, and in being more concerned with His disposing and choosing than with his own.

A Noted of Caution!

A certain gnostic [*Arifin*] once said, “In the regular recitation of Surah al-Waqiah there lies a secret which increases one's certainty, engenders peace in the heart, and adds to this a serenity, whether one

possesses (provision) or not. This is because Allah opens and closes it with a mention of the Appointed Time, and the ways in which people shall differ on that day.”

Anyone who reflects on this will be too preoccupied with it to attend to any worldly matter which he may face. Here, also, Allah makes mention of the origin of man’s creation, and how He makes his beginning a drop of seed expelled.

And how the crops and the water upon which their subsistence depends originate. He urges them to reflect on this, and makes them all aware that they did not possess the power to create, grow and protect their crops, or bring down the rain; and this teaches the most profound awareness of the Divine Power and the pre-existent will and knowledge of the Eternality Being.

When this awareness is coupled with the knowledge that Allah has guaranteed His servant’s provision and sustenance, the heart is calmed, and one then attends to the worship of the Lord.

والله أعلم.

And Allah knows best.



Chapter Six

An insight into why after reciting specific surah yet a person does not see its benefits!

Sometimes, a man may persevere in reciting particular surah, invocations, or prayers, for which promises of immediate benefits have been made, and yet see no result. He should not doubt the soundness of these truthful promises.

But he should rather blame himself, and attribute to himself a deficiency in certainty and concentration. For a man who recites or invokes is not termed a real ‘reciter’ or ‘invoker’ according to the religious law [*shariah*] unless all the conditions are fulfilled, and the fact is that most people fall short of doing this.

The essential element which will make these practices productive and fruitful is to nurture certainty in the heart that the matter is as it has been said, and to have neither doubts about it nor the desire to put it to trial. One should be genuinely concentrated, uniting one’s outward to one’s inward faculties in engaging the matter, with one’s heart sincerely thinking well of Allah, and be utterly and attentively oriented towards Him.

Rarely do these things come together in a man who is intent on reaching some objective by means of verses and invocations, whatever this objective maybe without this quest becoming his to control and manage at will. So let a servant whose determination falls short and whose earnestness and zeal are deficient blame only himself.

Allah never harms those who serve Him!

Chapter Seven

فِي ذِكْرِ السَّمَاعِ

Listening to Spiritual Recital [*Sama* ']

You ask whether a man should still attend gatherings to listen to spiritual recital when he feels his spirit becoming as though agitated during such sessions, and as a result, suffers a certain amount of fatigue.

Then you should know, and may Allah instruct you, that listening to spiritual recital [*sama* '] (in such a situation) is a hazardous matter, so much so that my master, the lordly spiritual leader [*qutb*], alAydarus, Abdullah ibn Abi Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him and cause us to benefit from him, remarked, “For every man whom Allah guides with this audition, He leads a thousand others astray,” or similar to what he said.

Then it must be made clear that the results of attending such session will depend on the motive behind it. The motivation must, therefore, be a true one, free from capricious and passionate desires, and one should listen only to what is deemed permissible by religious criteria. Listening to spiritual recital [*sama* '] is most beneficial when one listens to the Qur'an, *Sunna* or appropriate discourses.

However, the effects of listening to poetry, beautiful voices, and rhythmic melodies are also praiseworthy when related to religion; otherwise, they are simply permissible [*mubah*], and there is no harm in listening as long as they do not depart from the lawful. Our intention

in saying these few summary words is to treat the question briefly. Otherwise, the writings of earlier scholars, in particular, the “Revival”¹ and the “Gifts”² are full to the brim with lengthy explanations of the rules for these *sama* sessions.

As for the man in the state you describe, if he fears that in attending, he may slip into showing ostentation or affectation with others, then it is more appropriate for him not to participate. If he has no such fears but finds no benefit in listening to spiritual recitals [*sama*] session such as an increase in the determination and energy he feels for his devotions, his yearning for contemplation, or any other such thing, then it is again better for him not to attend, for no man should subject himself to unprofitable effort.

But if he does benefit, and makes religious gains, then he must weigh these against the effort involved, and choose the better and more profitable course.

On the whole, Gnostics [*Arifin*] attach no importance to physical discomfort and pain when set against the benefits and gains of the heart, for the essence of their method is the heart’s purification and reform, and directing it towards their Glorious Lord, and you should know this!

وَبِاللّٰهِ التَّوْفِيقُ.

Success is from Allah!



¹ *Ihya Ulum al-Din* or Revival of Religious Science of Imam al-Ghazali.

² *Awarif al-Ma'arif* or The Gifts of Gnostics by Shihab al-Din Al Suhrawardi.

Chapter Eight

Knowing A Thing is Distinct From Knowing That One Knows it.

You ask about the saying of the Imam, the [*Hujjatul*] Proof of Islam, the pride of rightly-guided leaders, the greatest of scholars, Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, may Allah sanctify his secret and bestow upon us some of his broad spiritual effulgence!

Al-Ghazali said, “The knowledge of a thing is distinct from the knowledge of the knowledge of that thing!”

You should know that these words are clear, and we shall offer an example to render them more intelligible. You know, for instance, that it is Allah Who has created you and everything else: this is the knowledge of the thing. You also understand that you know that Allah has created you; this is knowledge of the knowledge, and is distinct from the former. The separation of each from the other is capable of conceptualization.

Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad said, “Men are of four categories:

- [i] A man who knows, and knows that he knows: this is a learned man, so follow him;
- [ii] A man who knows but is not aware that he knows: this is a man asleep, so awaken him;
- [iii] A man who does not know but knows that he does not know: this is a seeker of guidance, so guide him;
- [iv] A man who does not know, and is unaware that he does not know: this is an ignorant man, so reject him!”

Chapter Nine

Knowledge Brings to Fruition Spiritual States [*Hal*] States Bring to Fruition Spiritual Stations [*Maqam*]

You also ask whether al-Ghazali's saying, "Knowledge brings to fruition a state [*hal*] and the state brings to fruition a station [*maqam*]", is an acknowledged fact, since one may gain a different understanding from the statements of other writers.

Know that the position of the Proof of Islam [al-Ghazali], may Allah have mercy upon him, is the one to be relied on in this matter, and those who say otherwise are to be discounted. The meaning of what he said can be clarified by explaining one of the stations of certainty, so that the case of other stations may be analogously appreciated.

Know that renunciation [*zuhud*] is one of the noble stations. It is established on the basis of the knowledge of what is stated in the Book [*Quran*], the Sunna, and by the virtuous men of this nation by way of disparagements of the world, criticisms of those who chase after it, and praises of those who turn away from it and are more intent on the hereafter. Following this, if one is given to succeed, one's heart is affected in such a way as to compel one to renounce the world and desire only the hereafter. Knowledge thus comes first, while its consequence is the state.

There then appear from the bodily organs and limbs acts which indicate the presence of this effect, such as shunning the pursuit of worldly riches or the accumulation of material things, and holding to the good works which bring advantage in the Hereafter. This effect then meets contrary influences, such as the insinuations of the devil

and the ego, which encourage him to desire the world. Following this onslaught, his state may then change, waver or weaken; it may at times vanish entirely, which is why it is termed a ‘state’. But when it becomes firmly established and is reinforced, and its roots are deeply implanted in the heart so that no passional thoughts are capable of affecting or shaking it, it is then called a ‘station’. Thus you have come to know that “knowledge brings to fruition a state, and the state brings to fruition a station”.

States and stations have signs and marks to indicate how sound and comprehensive they are, these appear on one’s outward form and are called ‘works’; which are also the result of knowledge, although they pertain only to the outer [*dzahir*] aspect, this being the difference between them and states. The author of the *Gifts* said that “states are the initial stages of stations, and the one who becomes firmly established in one of the stations of certainty will thereby possess the state belonging to the station immediately superior to it.” You should be aware of this fact.

Now, there are two types of state: the first is the one we have just mentioned, while the second comprises the divine noble gifts such as Intimacy [*uns*]¹, Absence [*ghayba*]², Intoxication [*sukr*]³ and Union [*jam*]⁴. These come to a heart illumined with the lights of self-discipline and spiritual effort.

States in these categories are not the result of knowledge, but of a penetrating concentration which takes the form of sincere transactions and honest intentions; these were not meant by the Imam in his statement. The states often spoken of by the Sufis are those of the second kind.

والله أعلم.

And Allah knows best.

¹ Intimacy [*uns*]¹ is a station higher than Hope [*raja*'] and Fear [*khawf*].

² Absence [*ghayba*]² is unaware of the world but attentive to Allah.

³ Intoxication [*sukr*]³ is when one experienced unveiling of divine lights.

⁴ Union [*jam*] is alighting of divine favors upon the heart.

Chapter Ten

It is Insufficient to Know that Allah is One When Performing an Act of Obedience to Allah

You also asked about Imam Ghazali's saying, "It is not sufficient just to have the knowledge of how to perform an act of obedience to Allah," it is also necessary to know the timing, procedure, and conditions.'

The 'timing' is the specific time prescribed when such acts are to be performed.

The 'procedure' is the correct manner of this performance, including the correct sequence. Like the ritual ablutions and prayers, for instance, are only valid if performed in the correct sequence. This is obligatory in those acts of worship where it can be conceived to apply. The status of timing and procedure is self-evident.

As regards to the 'conditions', he probably means whatever the validity (or alternatively, the perfection) of the act of obedience depends on. For example, the possession of reason is a condition for the validity of faith and Islam, and these, in turn, are the conditions for the validity of obligatory acts, the avoidance of forbidden things, and the seeking of nearness through supererogatory devotions and sincerity with Allah. And to purify one's intentions from the vice of ostentation is a condition for attaining to the benefits which all the above-mentioned actions will yield in the Hereafter.

والله أعلم.

And Allah knows best.

Chapter Eleven

On Involuntary Thoughts [*khawatir*]

And you ask about Imam Ghazali's statement, may Allah be pleased with him, on involuntary thoughts which come into the mind, and whether one is morally accountable for them.

This matter is clear, however, in order to explain it summarily we may say that thought, whether good or evil, brings neither reward nor retribution as long as it remains indecisive; but in the presence of decision and resolution, it attracts a reward of the same kind as itself.

You also ask about the relationship between these thoughts and the questions he discusses towards the end of the "Book of Fear and Hope", where he states that 'the inward attributes of a man who is a mixture [of good and evil], such as arrogance, ostentation, envy and their likes, will appear to him after death in horrifying forms which will torment him'. This is the rule for everyone who leaves this world before he has purified his inward aspect from such repugnant traits.' If this is indeed the passage you are referring to, then no problem exists, for thoughts are things which occur to the soul, and later reverberate in the breast until their aim is fulfilled although they may vanish before this. In the 'Book of Fear,' the author refers to the ruinous attributes which a man may harbour in himself and persistently maintain. They are a category of major sins of the inward and expose those who possess them to great retribution, both immediate and deferred. Great is the difference between the (ingrained) attributes of the heart and the thoughts that simply occur to it. If we have answered with our exposition the query you intended, then thanks be to Allah, if not, then send us the specific passage that you found problematic, so that we may clarify it for you, with Allah's help.

Chapter Twelve

On the Relationship Between the Tongue, the Mind and the Heart

You ask about the following statement of Imam al-Ghazali in his Book of the Secrets of Recitation, “The tongue is a counsellor, the mind an interpreter, and it is the heart which is influenced.”

The passage is clear: the function of the tongue is to produce the words which convey concepts; the mind listens to these words, extracts the concepts, and then casts them into the heart, which is then influenced by them. The mind is thus the heart’s minister and disposer, and, because it mediates between the tongue and the heart, it is called an ‘interpreter’ in contexts such as this. This applies to the Companions of the Right Hand [*asfabul Yamin*], to whom the concepts come during and after the recitation of Quran.

The Foremost in Faith [*al-muqarrabun*]¹, on the other hand, actually receive the ideas before the recitation, since the concepts are already established in their hearts and blended with their essential realities, so that they are ever-present, whether the tongue is actively reciting or not.

¹ Surah 56 al Waqiah verses 1-10 described “at the end of time men will be divided into three classes. The Foremost in Faith will be those closest to Allah.

Chapter Thirteen

Difference Between Jealousy for Allah, and Envy

You also ask about his saying, concerning a man who uses Allah's favours to disobey Him, "To wish for those favours to be taken away from him is not a kind of envy, but a fit of jealousy [*ghira*] on behalf of Allah the Exalted."

Know that what he, may Allah show him His mercy, wrote is correct. However, it is better, instead of wishing for the disobedient man to be deprived, to pray for him instead, that he may find guidance and be granted the good fortune of thanking his Lord and using His favours in ways beloved by Him. An example of the first policy is an episode in which Dhu'l-Nun, may Allah show him His mercy, once saw a boat carrying some people on their way to bear false witness against an innocent man, and he invoked Allah against them so that they drowned. When questioned about it he said, "Martyrdom [*shahada*] in the sea is better than false witness [*shahada al-zur*]"

An example of the second is provided by a tale of Ma'ruf al-Karkhi, may Allah have mercy upon him. He was once walking with his companions along the banks of the Tigris when he saw a group of corrupt people in a boat, occupied with drinking and other kinds of dissipation. His companions said to him, "Master, invoke Allah against them!" And he raised up his hands, and prayed, "O Allah, just as You have granted them joy in this world, grant them joy in the next!" When his companions asked him about this, he replied, "If He is to grant them joy in the next world, He shall surely relent towards

them.” And, in effect, it was not long before they came before the sheikh, having made their repentance.

Now, the course taken by Ma’ruf is the more perfect, for it displays the attribute of mercy present in Allah’s people, particularly those for whom the Divine Attribute of Beauty is unveiled. But the attitude cited by the Imam is also a noble station that of jealousy on behalf of Allah, which is more frequently found among those of the elect whose contemplation is that of the Divine Majesty.

You should also know that rightful jealousy [*ghira*] is of two kinds. The first is for one to be jealous for his Lord when His forbidden limits are violated and His rights neglected; this is also termed ‘Anger for Allah’, and it lies at the root of ‘enjoining good and forbidding evil’, and detesting the unjust and invoking Allah against them, as was done by Noah and Moses, may peace be upon them. The second is a man’s jealousy for something that is his and does not bear sharing, such as a wife. One may be excessive in this and go so far as to accuse guiltless people. One may also dislike sharing things which are susceptible to sharing, such as knowledge, devotion, honour, and eminence. One may even detest anyone who acquires a share of such items, and all this has nothing to do with the kind of jealousy that is praiseworthy.

As for the jealousy of Allah, the Exalted, it means that He is jealous towards His servants when they serve another and disobey and flaunt His commands. He is also jealous regarding His servants who claim to share in attributes which are exclusively His, such as Glory and Might, Exaltation and Impregnability; for such attributes are appropriately ascribed none other but to Allah, the Real, the Kind, the Compeller.

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

There is no god but He, the Exalted in Might, the Wise.

Chapter Fourteen

On Dreams and Visions

You also ask about the statement of the most-perfect *Sayyid* Zain al-Abidin ‘Ali ibn Abdullah al-Aydaras, may Allah have mercy on him, concerning visions [*ru’ya*] (whether in a dream or awake)?

Now, you should be aware that dreams and visions are a fraction of Prophethood.¹ They have a realm of their own which is intermediate between inner unveiling [*kashf*] and outward [*dzahir*] wakefulness.

They are the first things that attend the Saints, just as they attended the Messenger may blessings and peace be upon him, at the outset of his prophecy. Yet not everyone has dreams of this nature, and they are rarely genuine in the case of people who are doing evil as well as good.

The truthfulness of the tongue and the avoiding of corrupt imaginations and illusions are preconditions for the truth and righteousness of dreams.

People who mix evil with good deeds may receive something in the nature of real dreams, but the devil adds falsehoods to them so that the true and false are inseparably confused when an interpretation is attempted.

The man who is under the devil’s mastery in his waking state, a time when he is able to listen and understand, will be even more under his sway when asleep and deprived of his sense-faculties.

¹ “The righteous visions is one forty sixth part of Prophecy” as narrated in Bukhari

Dream-visions are unaffected by imperfections in one's physical body, provided that one's inner faculties remain sound. However, when one is overpowered by a severe illness, or dominated by one of the natural senses of humour, especially phlegm or black bile, one's dreams may become confused so that one sees a thing in a way that differs from what it is really indicating.

Imam al-Ghazali, may Allah have mercy on him, also said that it is rare for a man's dream to be true if he is given to dwelling on impossibilities or busy himself with saying things which lead to no good, or himself believes and perceives things differently from their reality, and then leads others down the same path. You should know this and reflect on it as it deserves, for it is a valuable insight. My success is only from Allah. On Him do I rely, and to Him is my return.

Here end the responses which I wished to provide for your questions; they are brief, but nonetheless contain explanations and clarifications which should prove more than sufficient for people endowed with understanding, and for those for whom indications render unnecessary the need for a full elaboration. 'The best discourse' as a proverb says, 'is brief yet informative.'

A long time ago you requested me to furnish you with a brief commentary on the poem by Sheikh Abu Bakr ibn Abdullah al-Aidarus Ba'Alawi, and I shall use this to provide a conclusion to the present treatise, so that we may profit from the sheikh's auspicious and blessed words.

May Allah grant people to benefit from him, and from all His righteous servants!



Epilogue

Explanation of the Ode of Habib Abu Bakr Al Aydrus

The following is a commentary and explanation on some finely-expressed, richly significant verses, which were composed by our master, the lordly pole, the master of the gnostics, the exemplar of all authoritative scholars, Sheikh Abu Bakr, son of Sheikh Abdullah al-Aidarus Ba'alawi, the syarif, the Husaini, may Allah sanctify his spirit, provide him light in his grave, and bestow upon us some of his blessings and secrets, in both the worlds. Ameen!

هَبَّةٌ نَسِيمُ الْمُوَاصِلَةِ بِلاَ اتِّصَالٍ وَلَا انفِصَالٍ

The zephyr¹ of the reunion has blown!
with neither connection nor separation;

بِمُقْتَضَى مَطْلَعِ خَفِيٍّ وَلَيْسَ لِلْعِلْمِ فِيهِ مَجَالٌ

By virtue of a hidden rising-place,
in which knowledge has no scope.

لَأَنَّهُ ثَمَرَةُ الْيَقِينِ وَمُزْتَقَى رُتْبَةِ الْكَمَالِ

For it is the fruit of certainty
and the attainment to the rank of perfection.

Now, the Sheikh may Allah be pleased with him, uses the word ‘zephyr’, which is the most subtle and gentle of winds, to designate the Divine gifts and lordly attractions with which Allah singles out His saints and real ones. Such are they whoever keep themselves in His Presence, are passionate in His love, concentrate their will in His obedience, roll up their sleeves to serve Him, conform to the usages of

¹ A light westerly wind.

spiritual courtesy in His presence, and shun all the animal pleasures and satanic attributes that may distract or distance them from Him.

The Sheikh uses the word ‘zephyr’ to denote this exalted gift, in order to protect the secrets from profanation from alterities. He describes it as being too holy to be subject either to ‘connection’ or ‘separation’, both being attributes of dense bodies which noble secrets and spirits transcend. Since the Real, Exalted is He! is beyond being subject to the union, it is to be expected that His gifts to His elect and the people of His Presence will also be so. Understand this!

The ‘**rising-place**’ is the means to the ascent, and its being ‘**hidden**’ is being too remote and subtle to be grasped either by the external senses or the invisible mind and thoughts.

The kind of knowledge caught by the net of the physical senses, the rational faculty, or even inspiration [*ilham*] ‘has no scope’, that is, to encompass any of it. People’s share in it is only to accept and believe it, since it is neither their prerogative nor does it lie within their scope; for it is part of the particular attribute of the spirit and the privilege of the secret, since it is the ‘fruit of certainty’, as said the sheikh, may Allah be pleased with him.

‘**Certainty**’ [*yaqin*] is the establishment and supremacy of faith in the heart, in such a fashion as to render instability and doubt inconceivable.

The ‘**fruit of certainty**’ is unveiling [*kashf*] and vision [*iyān*]. Unveiling is the state [*hal*] of the man of certainty, while certainty is his station [*Maqam*]. Certainty, on the other hand, is the state of the believer, while faith is his station. The believer has flashes of certainty, while the man of certainty has flashes of unveiling. The ‘attainment to the rank of perfection’ denotes unveiling, which is the first step in the stations of contemplation [*mushahada*], which is perfection. Then he, may Allah be pleased with him and may we benefit from him said,

فَالْاَقْتِدَا ثُمَّ الْاَقْتِدَا وَالْاَصْطِفَا حَالٌ فَوْقَ حَالٍ

Hence: emulation, then guidance,
then selection—state above the state.

فَمَنْ لَزِمَ مَا أُمِرَ بِهِ مِنْ الْعَمَلِ وَالْيَقِينِ نَالَ

Whoever holds to the acts and the certainty
that is required of him, shall obtain

حُلُولَ جَنَّاتِ أَنْسِهِ يَجْتَنِي ثَمَرَةَ الْوَصَالِ

In dwelling in the gardens of His intimacy,
and shall pick the fruits of arrival.

‘**Emulation**’ means following the Messenger may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him, in his character, conduct and words, and taking on his courtesies and customs, both inward and outward. The lights of guidance will cascade upon those who do this well and adequately, sincerely for the sake of Allah the Exalted, for guidance is the result of excellence in emulation and of self-discipline. Allah the Exalted has says,

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا.

‘And those who strive in Our cause We shall guide them to Our paths.’¹

This guidance is nothing other than the unveiling of the unequivocal Truth and the reception of things from the world of the Unseen. But this, and self-discipline, are preceded by two things, one of which is ‘guidance through clear exposition’ [*al-bayan*] and the other “guidance through providential success” [*al-tawfiq*].

‘Selection’ is to attain the realities of certainty, and the outpouring of the gifts which result from closeness to He Who is Mighty and Firm.

Just as ‘Guidance’ is a state higher than that of ‘Emulation’, being its fruit.

Thus ‘**Selection**’ is higher than ‘Guidance’, being its spirit and purpose. It denotes Allah’s selection of His servant to receive the gnosis and love of Him, the unveiling of the secrets of His Presence, and the contemplation of the lights of His holy Essence and Attributes.

¹ Surah 29 Al Ankabut Verse 69.

Now you should know this!

It is the nature of a sincere man of sound disposition, when he hears of these superior experiences and contemplations, to yearn for them. The Sheikh, therefore, gives him good tidings, and informs him of the way which leads to them, by saying to him, “whoever holds to (the acts and the certainty) that are required of him ...”.

‘Holding to’ means persistence and constancy. Both acts and certainty ‘are required of’ Allah’s servants: an ‘act’ here denoting an action in obedience, which has external aspects which pertain to the physical faculties, as in the case of the forms of the ritual prayer, alms, and so on; and also inner elements which characterize the outer aspect of the heart: these are the praiseworthy traits of character, such as humility, renunciation, contentment, and so forth.

‘Certainty’ - The inner aspect of the heart, in turn, is the locus of ‘certainty’, which, as we have said, means ‘true, sincere faith’. Allah, in His grace, has made it possible for a servant to attain to certainty, for He has set up the way of perseverance in acts of worship, reflection on the kingdom of the earth and the heavens, and meditating on the revealed signs (verses of the Qur’an).

When a man’s certainty becomes strong, and both his inward [*batin*] and outward [*dzahir*] aspects are made beautiful by the continuous performance of good works, he attains to his Lord’s nearness, is given to dwell in the delightful ‘Gardens of Intimacy’ and picks ‘the fruits of arrival’ to His great Presence.

The **‘fruits of arrival’** are the openings (of doors and unveiling), intimate comforts, lordly communing and conversations, and other experiences known to the people of Allah.

ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ.

‘That is Allah’s grace and favour; which He bestows upon whom He pleases¹ (of His servants).’

¹ There are three verses, Surah 62 Jumaah Verse 4, Surah 57 al-Hadid Verse 21 and Surah 5 Al Madih Verse 54

Then he, may Allah be pleased with him said,

هَذِهِ عُلُومٌ مُّحَقَّقَةٌ رِجَالُهَا نِعَمٌ مِنْ رِجَالٍ

These are realized sciences,

whose exponents are excellent men indeed.

يَقِينُهُمْ لَا اِزْتِيَابَ فِيْهِ وَهَدْيُهُمْ لَيْسَ بِهٖ ضَلَالٌ

No doubt is there in their certainty,

nor waywardness in their guidance.

قَدْ اِفْتَدَوْا ثُمَّ جَاهَدُوا وَشَاهَدُوا فَانْتَقَى الْمُحَالُ

They emulated, then struggled,

then contemplated, and the impossible vanished.

Having mentioned the subtle unveilings and contemplated realities that the Real conferred upon him, and following this with an exposition of the path that leads to them as an invitation to Allah the Exalted, and a counsel to Allah's servants, the Sheikh, may Allah grant us benefit through him, now begins to explain the nature of these 'openings' and that 'path'.

He said, "These are realized sciences," referring to the sciences obtained by those who, being qualified, see with the light of Allah, having passed from the narrow straits of imitation to the open expanse of unveiling, and having refused to content themselves with information rather than vision in contrast to those whose minds are inflexible, who stand by the opinions they have formed and by the intelligence and insight they think they possess. Such people sometimes deny the sciences of the Sufis, because these sciences are beyond their reach and capacity to acquire.

In the belief that no kind of knowledge can be beyond their grasp, they deny that of which they are ignorant. Because it is difficult for such minds to accept the inner consciousness of the Sufis, let alone attain to it, al-Junaid, may Allah show him His mercy, once said, "To believe in this science of ours is itself akin to sainthood."

The Sheikh next praises those people of Allah who attained this knowledge, then he said, "whose exponents are excellent men indeed." An 'excellent' man is he who has mastered his soul, cleansed

and purified it from vices, adorned it with the virtues, severed all bonds attaching his heart to the worlds, turned inwardly as well as outwardly towards the Divine Presence, established his heart in the attitudes of unification and single-hearted concentration, and his outer form in that of service to Allah the Exalted, as is the attribute of servants.

The **Sufis**, are the people who fit the above description, whose certainty is never tarnished with wavering or any doubt, and whose guidance, which comprises their sciences and their works, is never mingled with error, deviation from the truth, or inclination to falsehood. They are never satisfied with less than this as concerns their faith and certainty, and therefore impose forms of discipline and struggle upon their souls until the oceans of their souls become pure and limpid, and they actually attain to the unseen knowledge which the revealed Law had obliged them to believe in. Thus do their sciences and their works stand remote from ignorance, secure from misguidance; for they have taken them from their source, and dug them from their mine.

This condition, however, they only achieve once they have acquired the good manners prescribed by the Law, and have learnt the fundamental sciences of faith and Islam, then energetically practised what they had learnt, struggling against their egos and refining their characters by means of various disciplines and austerities.

It is to this that the Shaikh, may Allah be pleased with him, refers when he said, “They ‘emulated’ the term ‘emulation’ denoting, in this context, the acquisition and practice of necessary knowledge.

“Then ‘struggled’, in turn, refers to the disciplining and refining of the soul. Once they have these two foundations fully secured knowledge and the practice of it on the one hand, and effective discipline of their souls by weaning them from their habitual and familiar activities, together with sincere concentration on Allah the Exalted, on the other, their inner aspects become illuminated, their inward eyes open, and they thus contemplate the world of Unseen Realms [*Malakut*] and experience the essential realities of the world of divine names and attributes [*Lahut*]. The impossible then vanishes,

in other words, disappears from perception (as for its real existence, it was ever vanishing).

The ‘impossible’ here denotes that which has no independent reality of its own, and no autonomous existence when considered it and this is the inevitable attribute of all that is not Allah the Exalted. The Shaikh, may Allah be pleased with him, then said,

عَلِمَ الْيَقِينِ ثُمَّ عَيْنُهُ بَلَّ حَقُّهُ مَا بَقِيَ احْتِمَالُ

They had the ‘knowledge of certainty’, then its ‘eye’,
nay rather, its ‘truth’; no conjectures remain.

فَنَوَّاهُ عَنِ الْكَوْنِ جُمْلَةً لَمَّا بَدَا طَالِعُ الْجَلَالِ

They were extinguished to the universe entirely,
when the rising-star of Majesty appeared.

وَأَخْيَا هُمْ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهِمْ بِالْجَمْعِ فِي مَشْهَدِ الْجَمَالِ

It revived them after they had been dead,
through union at the witnessing-place of Beauty.

Know that the term ‘Knowledge of Certainty’ [*ilm al-yaqin*] refers to sincere faith supported by clear proof and sound evidence. The ‘Eye of Certainty’ [*Ain al-yaqin*] is one degree higher: it is for a man to lose the need for evidence, since the truth appears to him either as actual vision or nearly so.

Whilst the ‘Truth of Certainty’ [*haqq al-yaqin*] is the highest degree, being known as the unconditioned and supreme unveiling, and belongs exclusively to the greatest among saints, the elect among the chosen gnostics. It is in this degree that the prophets and their perfected heirs, the True People of Allah [*siddiqin*], are firmly established.

As for his saying, may Allah grant us benefit through, “No conjectures remain”, this signifies that no scope for doubt or uncertainty can any longer exist.

Complete “extinction” from the cosmos is a noble state attained by the people of Allah. It has many sublime and subtle meanings, of which the one intended here is the extinction of the person’s perception of himself and all other created things.

This extinction occurs at the appearance of the Real's Attributes of Majesty and Compulsion. As these become unveiled, formal human traces are extinguished, and all vestiges of the cosmos vanish.

When such an extinction occurs, the Living Sustainer manifests Himself to them in His Attributes of Beauty and Gentleness, whereupon their spirits are given life, their secrets are revived, while their formal traces and habits remain in the state of death induced in the 'extinction by Majesty'. Allah, Transcendent is He, then keeps them for as long as He wills in this state of 'contemplating the Beauty', which is termed 'Union'. Here their spirits find the inexpressible joy of proximity and the delight of the intimacy which lovers grieve for when it is gone, and for which the people of realization yearn.

It is to this great joy and bliss that Ibn al-Farid refers in the following words:

تِلْكَ اللَّيَالِي الَّتِي تَعْتَدُ مِنْ عُمْرِي مَعَ الْأَحَبَّةِ كَانَتْ كُلُّهَا عُرْسًا

Each of those nights of my life which passed
with the loved ones, was a wedding-night!

لَمْ يَحُلْ لِلْعَيْنِ شَيْءٌ بَعْدَ بُعْدِهِمْ وَالْقَلْبُ مُذْ أَنْسِ التَّذْكَارِ مَا أَنْسَا

After leaving them, nothing was dear to my eye;
my heart, remembering them, found solace in nought else.

يَا جَنَّةً فَارَقْنَاهَا النَّفْسُ مُكْرَهَةً لَوْلَا النَّاسِي بَدَارِ الْحُلْدِ مِثْ أَسَا

O paradise from which the soul falls ennobled!

Did I not yearn for the Lasting Abode I would perish from grief.

The poems of Ibn al-Farid, may Allah spread his benefit, contain many other allusions to the subject we have just discussed, as do the writings of Shaikh al-Sudi and other well-grounded gnostics who were qualified to give such indications.

Now, the station [*maqam*] into which the Real moves such of them as He wishes to be of benefit to His servants is more noble and perfect than the state of extinction [*fana*]; it is known as the station of Subsistence [*baqa*]. Here the gnostic returns to creation, and summons

mankind to Allah, the Exalted. He forces himself to assume their manner of living, so that there may exist some degree of harmony between him and them, which makes it possible for them to respond to his summons.

A full exposition of this matter would be very lengthy; and would, moreover, involve subtle concepts and hidden mysteries which are not to be entrusted to the pages of a book, lest they are read by the unqualified, who might then claim these states as their own and thus stray from the Straight Path. Then the Shaikh, may Allah be pleased with him, goes on to declare:

حَتَّى صَفَى إِبْرِيْزُ تَبْرِهْمَ فَلَا يُسَاوِيْهِ قَطُّ مَالٌ

Until their gold was made so pure,
that no wealth could ever equal it.

فَالْكُوْنُ قَدْ صَارَ طَوْعَهُمْ وَلَا بُحَالٍ فِي الْاِنْفِعَالِ

The universe has submitted to them,
and differs not from their disposing.

هَذَا هُوَ الْمُلْكُ بِلَا مِرٍّ وَلَا اِنْعِرَالٍ وَلَا اخْتِلَالٍ

This is real kingship, without dispute,
without withdrawal or contravention.

Having explained the state of extinction [*fana*] which takes place during the contemplation of the Majesty and the Beauty, the Shaikh then specifies the results of such a reflection including the purification of the self [*nasf*] of its areas of thoughtlessness and its dense attributes.

To clarify this: the wayfarer, however thoroughly he may discipline his self [*nafs*] and struggle against it, nevertheless retains specific residues of thoughtlessness and attachments to created things and habits; and these are never entirely erased before the advent of full extinction.

This is why no wayfarer is qualified to be a sheikh and a caller to Allah [*dai illalla*] before he has reached the states of extinction [*fana*] and subsistence [*baqa*].

There is the standard variety of gold, in which traces of other substances remain; and there is pure gold. The inner essence of these gnostics becomes purified from the contingencies represented by material bodies, and from all attachments to the worlds. Hence their gnoses, sciences, character traits and works become such that no wealth can possibly equal them. The ‘wealth’ here refers to the wealth of those who have not attained states equal to theirs. ‘Wealth’ means whatever is of benefit, and in this context, the benefits referred to concern Allah and the hereafter.

When their desires melt into nothingness, their will and wish to make, their own choices are extinguished. They have neither passion nor purpose in whatever is not Allah and does not bring them closer to Him. The created worlds obey such a person, and submit to him, just as he has obeyed and submitted to his Creator;

The universes can never be with a component, thus for whoever is Allah’s, Allah is his, and when Allah the Exalted is his, the created worlds in all their entirety obey and submit to him.

In one of Allah’s revealed scriptures, it is written: “O son of Adam! I am Allah, Who says: ‘Be!’ and it is! Obey Me! And I shall make you say to a thing ‘Be!’ and it is.”

By Allah’s power, anything that the gnostic [*Arifin*] wishes for or desires will occur, in the same manner, that he wants it. However, since his will, desire, deliberation and choice are extinguished, he only desires and chooses that which Allah desires and chooses: so that his purpose becomes none other than Allah’s. Understand this, for it is a subtle thing! By his concern and concentration, a gnostic [*Arifin*] is capable of influencing whatever he directs himself towards. However, he never does this unless he has divine permission.

The fact that the created universes are obedient to Allah’s saints is well-known, having been established through parallel chains of transmission. It often happens to wayfarers who are on the verge of the degrees of unveiling but have yet to enter them completely, that tangible benefits are yielded through spiritual concentration and

orientation; so that these wayfarers are strengthened by the events that are wrought through them. These also happen with the people of extinction; who, however, are scarcely aware of them, because of their absorption in Allah and unawareness of all created things.

By contrast, such things seldom happen with the people of Subsistence, who are responsible for the task of summoning people to Allah the Exalted, since they serenely depend on Him, and are content with His judgments and decrees, so that their concern and concentration are rarely focused on any such thing. They may be permitted to demonstrate certain supernatural things, either to strengthen a seeker's flagging resolution or to challenge an obstinate denier of Allah's signs or of His special favours upon His saints.

However, were a gnostic [*Arifin*] to concentrate on a mountain so as to make it vanish, or a sea in order to turn it dry, there would be nothing in this but Allah's power.

Furthermore, the gnostic show only disdains for those who desire such miracles [*karamah*] and choose to pursue them for their own sake. They say, "The real miracles [*karamah*] is rectitude [*istiqama*]", which denotes excellence in following the Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, both outwardly and inwardly.

No-one attains to such supernatural things until, by discipline, his soul becomes exceedingly subtle, and he gains the ability to guard the secrets and strips himself of all self-oriented desires.

And if any such event should ever manifest itself to someone who has not mastered all these things, then it will be a temptation [*fitna*] for him, unless Allah guard and protect him. Allah's saints attain to protection from enslavement to the created worlds, invulnerability to material contingencies, utter devotion to Him, and concentration on Him by relinquishing everything, whatever it may be, that may distract and separate them from His Presence. This is 'true kingship', the possessor of which is to be envied, and the establishment and maintenance of which requires neither servants and wealth nor arrangements and preoccupation. It is free of competition

with alterities, safe from being disputed by villains, remote from misery, trouble and adversity. It transcends discontinuity, isolation, evanescence, and termination since these are the changes to which kingship in this world is subject, and which otherworldly kingship transcends.

The noblest degree of ‘kingship’ is for a man to be king of his own soul and passions, dependent on none but Allah, and willing and desiring nothing of either world but His nearness and good-pleasure. This is the attribute of Allah’s saints and elect.

رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

“May Allah will be pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the Party of Allah. Truly it is the Party of Allah that will achieve Felicity”¹.

In these verses, despite their brevity, the Shaikh, may Allah be pleased with him and spread his benefit, has included a mention of the openings that Allah granted him and caused him to attain to, the unveiling and contemplative visions that He conferred upon him, the path that leads to Allah from beginning to end, a description of Allah’s saints, and of the main privileges they are given pertaining to their nearness to Allah: the gift of purity from the soiling attachment to the transient worlds, the ability to influence beings at will, and the true kingship that neither subside nor comes to an end.

تَمَّتْ وَصَلُّوا عَلَى النَّبِيِّ مَهَذَّبُ الْقَوْلِ وَالْفِعَالِ

The poem is finished; offer prayers for the Prophet,
he whose words and acts were refined;

وَصَحْبِهِ سَادَةُ الْوَرَىٰ وَإِلَيْهِ خَيْرُ كُلِّ آلٍ

And his Companions, lords of mankind,
and his House, best of all houses.

It is thus time for the Shaikh to conclude his verses, having helped the sincere seeker, and favoured the firm aspirant with an explanation of the path to Allah, so that no further clarifications need be made.

¹ Surah 58 Mujadila end part of Verse 22.

He ends by urging his readers to send blessings onto the Messenger of Allah, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him and his family. This 'blessing' is a mercy from Allah, together with a glorification which befits the noble rank of Prophethood.

By concluding in this wise, with an appeal to pray blessings on the Prophet, the poet draws attention to, and proclaims, the fact that everything that the Shaikh, or any other gnostic, experienced, was but a consequence of thorough emulation and perfect following of the Messenger, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him and his family, 'whose words and acts were refined'.

For his speech, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, and his family was the absolute truth, free from everything that people mingle with their words, whether of lies or other imperfections.

Allah the Exalted says, وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ. إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ.

"Nor does he say (aught) of (his own) Desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him."¹

His acts, too, were refined, and free from the imperfections that spoil human actions. Being aided with inerrancy, and chosen for the Divine Revelation, he spoke and acted solely at the Lord's command.

Blessed are those that emulate him, are guided by him, and practice his actions [*sunnas*]! And alas, alas for those who diverge from following him, are sluggish in responding to his call, and whose conduct departs from his guidance and practices.

'His Companions' denotes those who accompanied him during his lifetime, believed in him, emigrated to him, supported his religion, struggled with him, and transmitted what they heard of his utterances and saw of his acts.

Because of these privileges and merits, which are exclusively theirs, they became the **'lords of mankind'**, and the imams of rightly-guidance

¹ Surah 53 an Najm Verses 3 – 4.

His ‘**Household**’ denotes all his relatives, who combine blood-bonds with ties of religion; and they are the closest and most beloved to him. Allah has made it incumbent upon the nation [*ummah*] to love and treat them kindly. He has honoured them with purity from all abomination. They are the ‘**best of houses**’ because they are the house of ‘he’ who was the best and most honourable of all creation, may blessings and peace be upon him.

This honour is not entirely theirs, however, unless they follow their master, he with whom Allah has honoured them. For all people, they are the most obliged and deserving to do so.

Those of them who neglect to do so, and fail to expend their best efforts to this end, are more deserving of the censure and ill-fortune which befall those who turn away from following the Chosen One, and they will be subjected to a more significant share of this than the others.

As for those members of the Prophetic House whose emulation is thorough: their honour and merit are more significant, more perfect, higher and more elegant than that of others of similar conduct.

O our Lord! Grant us perfection in following Your Messenger, may Allah’s blessings and peace be upon him and his family, in his character, conduct and speech. Help and guide us to achieve this; grant us sincerity and truthfulness in doing this, make us live and die in this manner, until the Day You reunite us to Your Prophet, in Your Abode of Honor, remaining pleased with us always, in goodness and wellbeing, O Most Merciful of the merciful!

Here end the words I have been able to explain concerning the verses of my master the Shaikh.

I do not claim that what I have written conveys his exact intention, but it represents something of what I have understood from his words, and it is of the truth. If it does conform to what the Shaikh intended, then praise belongs to Allah; if not, then it is still part of what is correct and will benefit, Allah willing, those of our companions and other beloved ones attached to us who shall read it.

I do confess, from certainty, not from conjecture and guesswork, that I am bereft and devoid of the realities of the people of Allah, of their experiences and praiseworthy ways. However, I know that in myself I harbour love and attachment to them, an inclination to imitate them and increase their number, together with thinking well of them, trusting in them and in all the Openings which Allah grants them, which are the experiences of unveiling and contemplation.

I hopefully pray to Allah to join me unto them and to grant me, by His grace, something of their privileged gifts of gnosis [*arif*] and love. It was narrated in hadith,

‘A man is with those he loves,’

المرء مع مَنْ أَحَبَّ

‘He who imitates a people is one of them,’ مَنْ تَشَبَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ فَهُوَ مِنْهُمْ
and

مَنْ كَثَّرَ سَوَادَ قَوْمٍ فَهُوَ مِنْهُمْ

‘He who increases a people’s numbers is one of them.’

However, the path of this People has faded, its formal activities have shrivelled, and its landmarks are obliterated for the lack of sincere people, so much so that today there is hardly a single sincere seeker of it, while the people discoursing about it has come to be perceived as nothing more than eloquence and artful expression. Then

لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ

“There is neither ability nor power except that of Allah, the Almighty.”

How excellent are the words of Shaikh Abu Madyan, may Allah be pleased with him, in his poem which begins with the words,

مَا لَذَّةُ الْعَيْشِ إِلَّا صُحْبَةُ الْفُقَرَا هُمْ السَّلَاطِينُ وَالسَّادَاتُ وَالْأُمَرَا

‘The delight of life is only in the company of the *fuqara*¹,

They are the real rulers, leaders and governors of mankind.

¹ Meaning “in need” or poor but here Abu Madyan referred “fuqara” to those who yearn for and in need of Allah in asceticism, piety and spiritual well guided.

Just like myself, he also offers an apology and a confession, and announces the effacement¹ of the Path:

وَعَلِمَ بِأَنَّ طَرِيقَ الْقَوْمِ دَارِسَةً وَحَالُ مَنْ يَدْعِيهَا الْيَوْمَ كَيْفَ تَرَى

And know that the People's path is effaced:

you have seen the state of he who claims it today.

مَتَى أَرَاهُمْ وَأَتَى لِي بِرُؤْيَيْهِمْ أَوْ تَسْمَعُ الْأُذُنُ مِنِّي عَنْهُمْ خَبْرًا

When shall I see them; how can it be mine to see them?

or when shall the ear hear news of them?

مَنْ لِي وَأَتَى لِمِثْلِي أَنْ يُزَاحِمَهُمْ عَلَى مَوَارِدَ لَمْ أَلَفْ بِهَا كَدْرًا

How could one such as I keep their company,

at watering-places which know no turbidity?

أَحِبُّهُمْ وَأَدَارِيهِمْ وَأُوثِرُهُمْ بِمُهِجَّتِي وَخُصُوصًا مِنْهُمْ نَفَرًا

I love them; I serve them, I put them before myself,

with my life, and especially a group among them:

قَوْمٌ كِرَامُ السَّجَايَا حَيْثُمَا جَلَسُوا يَبْقَى الزَّمَانُ عَلَى آثَارِهِمْ عَطِرًا

Men of noble traits, who, wherever they have sat,

leave that place wreathed in fragrance unending.

يُهْدِي التَّصَوُّفُ مِنْ أَخْلَاقِهِمْ طَرَفًا حُسْنُ التَّأَلُّفِ مِنْهُمْ رَاقِبِي نَظَرًا

Sufism guides their characters to subtlety,

the elegant concord between them delights my eye.

هُمْ أَهْلُ وَدِّي وَأَحْبَابِي الَّذِينَ هُمُو مِمَّنْ يَجْرُ ذُبُولُ الْعِزِّ مُفْتَخِرًا

They are my folk, my love, my loved ones, who

are worthy to walk in robes of pride and glory.

لَا زَالَ شَمْلِي بِهِمْ فِي اللَّهِ مُجْتَمِعًا وَدَنْبًا فِيهِ مَغْفُورًا وَمُعْتَفِرًا

May my gathering to them in Allah, wherever done,

yield remission of my sins, and His forgiveness.

¹“effacement” means to withdraw in order to make oneself inconspicuous; the making of oneself inconspicuous. Here in reference to the “Path” [*Tariqa*]

Here ends the book entitled “Gifts for the Seeker”, being some Answered Questions. May Allah render it purely for His sake, and make of it a means to His mercy and good-pleasure. May He forgive us everything it contains that diverges from the truth and inclines towards falsehood, or is the fruit of caprice, or is blemished with ostentation or affectation. May He also forgive the one who provided the motive for writing it, the one who wrote it, those who read or hear it, our parents and loved ones, and all other Muslims. And all praises and thanks belong to Allah.

O Lord Allah! We know and are sure that whatever good thing we possess inner or outward, religious or worldly, is from You and no-one else. You have no partner! May You be praised and thanked! We seek the protection of Your noble Countenance against the loss of blessings and the onset of misfortune. We ask, by Your grace, that You treat us in accordance with Your goodness and generosity, for though we are unworthy of that, You are not! Lord.

Forgive, and have mercy, for You are the Most Merciful! And peace be upon the Messengers; and all praises and thanks belong to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

Its dictation was completed early on Friday the fifteenth of Muharram, the first month of the year 1072" of the Prophet's Emigration, may the best of blessings and peace be upon him.

May Allah, bless our master, Muhammad,
his House and Companions, and
grant them abundant peace,
until the Day of Reckoning.

وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ.

And praise is for Allah, Lord of the Worlds.